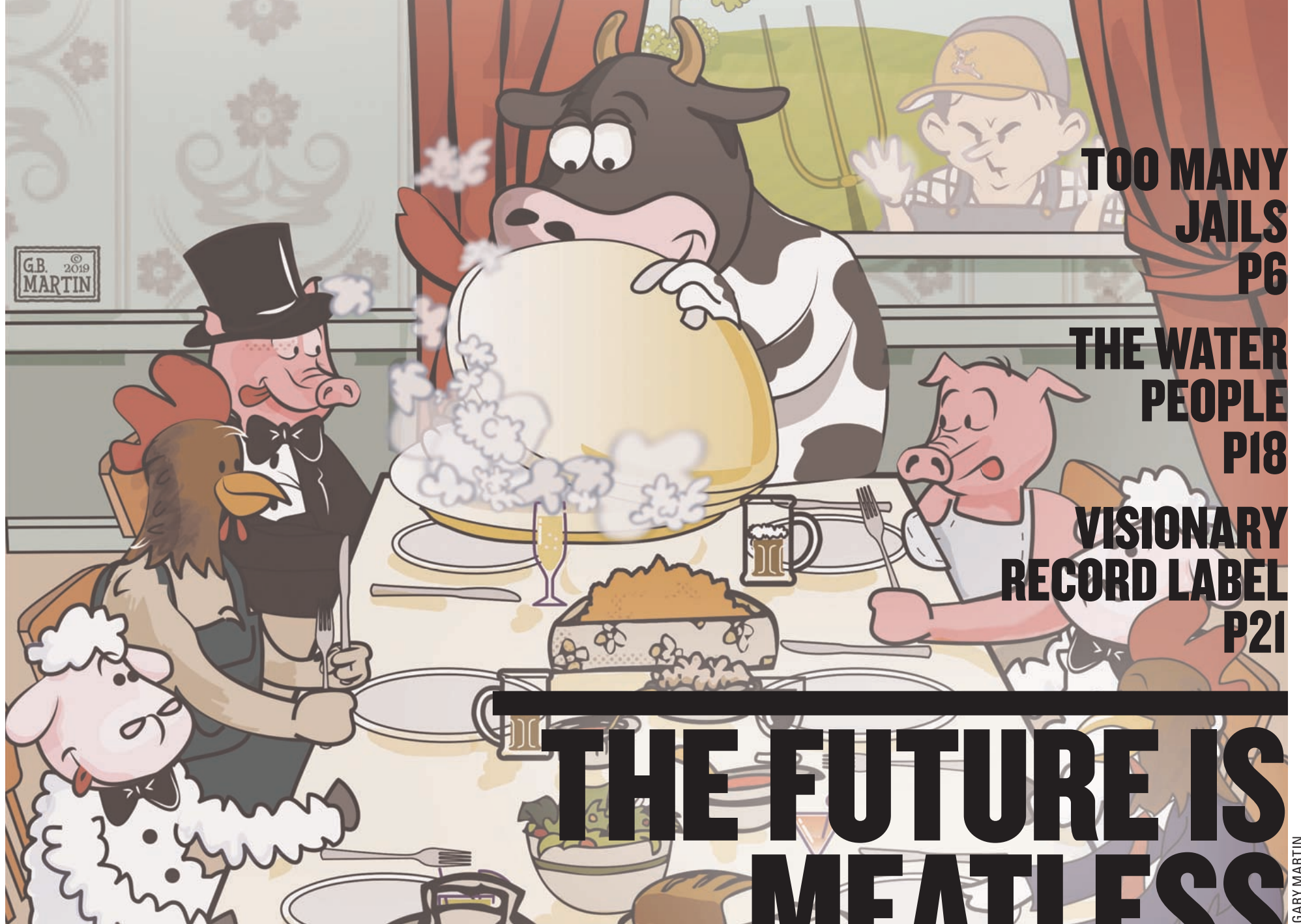


**THE**

= BATTLE OF SEATTLE, 20 YEARS LATER — P16 =

# INDYPENDENT

#252: NOVEMBER 2019 • [INDYPENDENT.ORG](http://INDYPENDENT.ORG)



G.B. 2019  
MARTIN

**TOO MANY  
JAILS  
P6**

**THE WATER  
PEOPLE  
P18**

**VISIONARY  
RECORD LABEL  
P21**

## THE FUTURE IS MEATLESS

GARY MARTIN

**HUMANS HAVE EATEN MEAT FOR MORE THAN 2 MILLION YEARS.  
THAT MAY SOON CHANGE. P12**

**ATIVISTAS DA AMAZÔNIA**

**HONORING DEFEND DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL  
REVEREND BILLY AND THE STOPSHOPPING CHOIR  
SUNDAY NOV24 2PM JOES PUB [REVBILLY.COM](http://REVBILLY.COM)**



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**BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

Ellen Davidson, Anna Gold,  
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**EXECUTIVE EDITOR:**

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**MANAGING EDITOR:**

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**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:**

Ellen Davidson, Alina  
Mogilyanskaya, Nicholas  
Powers, Steven Wishnia

**ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR:**

Frank Reynoso

**DESIGN DIRECTOR:**

Mikael Tarkela

**DESIGNERS:**

Leia Doran, Anna Gold, Evan  
Sult

**ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER:**

Dean Patterson

**GENERAL INQUIRIES:**

contact@indypendent.org

**SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:**

submissions@indypendent.org

**ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:**

ads@indypendent.org

**VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS:**

Linda Martín Alcoff, Charlyne  
Alexis, Bennett Baumer,  
Jenny Blair, Sue Brisk, Valerio  
Ciriaci, Rico Cleffi, Renée  
Feltz, Lynne Foster, Emma  
Gaffney, Esteban Guerra,  
Theodore Hamm, David  
Hollenbach, Manvi Jalan,  
Sophia Lebowitz, Derek  
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Chelsey Sanchez, Steven  
Sherman, Naomi Ushiyama,  
Isobel van Hagen, Tyrone  
Wallace, and Chris Wright.

**VOLUNTEER DISTRIBUTORS:**

Erik Anders-Nilssen, Eric  
Brelsford, Chris & Pam  
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Joseph Epstein, Kim Frazcek,  
Lew Friedman, Mindy  
Gershon, Tami Gold, Priscilla  
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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## NOVEMBER

**ONGOING**

THU & FRI 1PM–3PM • \$35–\$45  
**HISTORY: CHINATOWN'S ALLEYS:**  
AN EXCLUSIVE HISTORIC TOUR  
Stops will include the Chinese  
Consolidated Benevolent Association  
building, Transfiguration Church, the  
Doyers Street Post Office, Huang  
Da Xian Taoist Temple, Jing Fong  
Restaurant and the usually off-limits  
Confucius Plaza Inner Court.  
*CHINATOWN INFORMATION KIOSK*  
At Baxter St. & Canal St., Mnhtn

**TUE NOV 12**

7PM–9PM • FREE  
**TALK: ECOLOGIES OF TRANSITION**  
**ROUNDTABLE: HYDROLOGICAL TIES**  
**THAT BIND**  
Hear from the Gowanus Canal  
Conservancy and Resilient Red Hook  
about the challenges facing their  
low-lying coastal neighborhoods and  
collaborate on shaping a Green New  
Deal for Brooklyn.  
*PIONEER WORKS*  
159 Pioneer St., Bklyn

**WED NOV 14**

11AM–5PM • \$11–\$41  
**CONFERENCE: ARTSLINK ASSEM-**  
**BLY 2019: GLOBAL WARNING —**  
**ARTISTS & THE ANTHROPOCENE**  
How can we all better support  
local and international artists in  
their vital work on the front lines of  
social change? ArtsLink Assembly  
advocates for local and interna-  
tional engagement, offers challeng-  
ing examples, explores significant  
questions and proposes new thinking.  
Most of all, it seeks to inspire us all  
to energy and action. Amy Goodman  
of *Democracy Now!* will give the  
introductory remarks.  
*BARUCH PERFORMING ARTS*  
*CENTER*  
55 Lexington Ave., Mnhtn

**NOV 14–NOV 16**

THU–SAT, times vary • \$35 & up  
**CONFERENCE: SPEAKING TRUTH:**  
**CREATIVE TIME SUMMIT**  
The 10th annual Creative Time  
Summit asks participants, “Can  
speaking truth to power unravel the  
age of delusion we find ourselves  
in?” As fierce debates about the  
nature of truth rage on globally,  
writers, activists, artists and critical  
theorists converge to explore radical  
truth-telling, its implications and  
its challenges across disparate yet  
interconnected fields.  
*THE GREAT HALL AT COOPER UNION*  
*(AND SATELLITE LOCATIONS)*  
7 E. 7th St., Mnhtn

**SAT NOV 16**

6PM–8PM • FREE  
**LIT: WRITING ON RACE & IMMIGRA-**  
**TION: AN EVENING OF MEMOIR**  
This fall, a group of eight writers  
gathered at the Lewis Latimer House  
Museum to explore the topics of  
race and immigration. Celebrate the  
conclusion of the workshop with  
readings by the participants.  
*LEWIS LATIMER HOUSE MUSEUM*  
34-41 137th St., Queens

**SAT NOV 16**

7PM–10PM • FREE  
**BOOK LAUNCH: A PLANET TO WIN**  
Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni,  
Daniel Aldana Cohen and Thea Rio-  
francos in conversation around their  
new book, which asks, ‘How can we  
connect the politics of a Green New  
Deal with the fight for economic and  
racial justice?’ Moderated by *New*  
*Republic* staff writer Osita Nwanevu.  
*VERSO BOOKS*  
20 Jay St., Suite 1010, Bklyn

**SUN NOV 17**

1PM–3PM • FREE  
**EDUCATION: SECURI-TEA TIME:**

**FEMINIST CYBER SELF-DEFENSE**

Our digital lives may not be as sepa-  
rate from our analog lives as they  
used to be. And, just like in the analog  
world, abusive and toxic dynamics  
play a role in continually marginalizing  
historically marginalized identities.  
This social event from the CyPurr  
Collective hopes to build a system of  
support offline by creating a comfort-  
able space to discuss issues, share  
experiences, ask questions and build  
digital agency.  
*BLUESTOCKINGS BOOKSTORE, CAFÉ,*  
*& ACTIVIST CENTER*  
172 Allen St., Mnhtn

**SUN NOV 17**

2PM–6PM • FREE  
**COMMUNITY: THANKSGIVING-**  
**PALOOZA**  
New York State of Mind hosts this  
pre-Thanksgiving event featuring  
raffles, karaoke, arts and crafts  
and more.  
*MAYDAY SPACE*  
176 St. Nicholas Ave., Bklyn

**WED NOV 20**

6PM–8PM • FREE  
**REFLECTION: TRANS DAY OF RE-**  
**MEMBRANCE**  
Come memorialize those who  
have been murdered as a result  
of transphobia.  
*CLAGS: CENTER FOR LGBTQ STUDIES*  
*AT THE CUNY GRADUATE CENTER*  
365 5th Ave., Rm 7115, Mnhtn

**NOV 21–DEC 1**

MON, THU–SAT 7PM, SUN 3PM •  
\$25 (\$21 for students & seniors)  
**THEATER: OTHER THAN WE**  
This eco-feminist climate fiction fable  
with music moves from a dystopian  
reality to astonishing hope as four  
scientists risk their lives to create  
new life on earth, after “the deluge.”  
Monday and Thu–Sat performances

at 7 p.m., Sunday  
matinee at 3 p.m.  
*LA MAMA THEATER*  
66 E. 4th St., Mnhtn

**SAT NOV 23**

10AM–6PM • FREE  
**EDUCATION: REPRODUCTIVE JUS-**  
**TICE ACTIVIST DAY SCHOOL**  
A day of political education designed  
to inform strategies for activists in the  
fight for reproductive justice. Topics  
to be discussed include: clinic de-  
fense, Medicare for All, abortion and  
going on strike for abortion rights.  
*VERSO BOOKS*  
20 Jay St., Suite 1010, Bklyn

**SAT NOV 23**

10PM–4AM • FREE  
**MUSIC: BODEGA EN FUEGO**  
These OG stoop kids bring the heat.  
*STARR BAR*  
214 Starr St., Bklyn

**THU NOV 28**

2PM–5PM • FREE  
**FOOD: VEGAN THANKSGIVING**  
**COMMUNITY FEAST**  
Join Chilis on Wheels for a delicious  
vegan meal.  
*TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK*

**FRI NOV 29**

6:30PM–9PM • \$4–\$13 sliding scale  
**SCREENING: THE STUART HALL**  
**PROJECT**  
Visionary director John Akomfrah  
weaves between the musical archae-  
ology of Miles Davis, the political nar-  
ratives of the new post-war left and  
the life and works of cultural theorist  
Stuart Hall.  
*THE PEOPLE'S FORUM*  
320 W. 37th St., Mnhtn

**SAT NOV 30**

7PM • \$20  
**DANCE: POWERFUL SOUNDS:**  
**ECSTATIC DANCE**  
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kind performances that harness the  
restorative power of sound. This in-  
stallation features Ecstatic Dance,  
a community gathering for people

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who want to express themselves freely, to connect and to expand together through the inspiration of music and dance.

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**SUN DEC 1**  
7PM-9PM • \$20  
PERFORMANCE:  
CONVERSATIONS  
WITH CLAY-  
WOMAN

Claywoman is 500 million years old and from the Mirillion Galaxy. She travels to Earth (one of her favorite planets) from time to time to check in on us and engage in dialogue. On this visit, she arrives while our species is in a particularly dangerous predicament. She looks forward to chatting with some old friends and taking questions from the audience.  
**PANGEA**  
178 Second Ave., Mnhtn

**DEC 5-DEC 15**  
Times vary • \$20  
**THEATER: BREAD & PUPPET**  
The legendary theater troupe comes home to its Lower East Side roots with its annual holiday performance. This year features the *Honey Let's Go Home Opera* from Dec. 5-8 and the *Diagonal Life Circus* from Dec. 12-15. Thursday-Saturday shows will be held at 8 p.m. with Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3 p.m.

**A HEADY BREW:** Director John Akomfrah weaves the cultural theories of Stuart Hall with the music of Miles Davis in this doc, screening at The People's Forum on Nov. 29.

**ECO-FEMINIST FABLE:** Four women scientists risk their lives to create new life on Earth in *Other Than We*, an astonishingly hopeful play about life on the other side of our present climate dystopia. Opening night at La MaMa Theater is Nov. 21.

**THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY**  
155 1st Ave., Mnhtn

**THU DEC 12**  
6:30 PM • FREE  
**LITERATURE: SINCERELY, RALPH ELLISON**  
An evening highlighting the literary and interior life of Ralph Ellison, novelist, scholar, critic, best known for the seminal work *Invisible Man*. The program will feature authors and historians reading letters from the new collection: *The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison* edited by John F. Callahan.  
**SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE**  
515 Malcolm X Blvd, Mnhtn



LUBELUKOVA

# IN THIS ISSUE

## NEWS IN BRIEF, P4

AOC primaried, O'Neill resigns, community radio returns, ranked-choice voting and more.

## EASY RIDER, P5

14th St. is now car-free. Who's next?

## THE END OF RIKERS?, P6

The penal colony isn't closing, it's just leaving the island.

## REBIRTH OF A NATION, P7

Reconstruction's legacy lives on today.

## A HOMELESS SHELTER FOR GLENDALE, P8

When an insular Queens community feels under siege.

## A KITCHEN SINKING FEELING, P10

Should Newark's lead crisis make you worry about NYC water pipes?

## BLIND JUSTICE, P11

A court rebukes the Brooklyn DA's office for witness suppression.

## MEAT THE FUTURE, P12

...thanks to climate change, it may be vegetarian.

## HIGH CRIMES & MISDEMEANORS, P14

Why Trump's impeachment had to happen.

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Ryan Grim's new book delves into the roots of AOC's rise.

## WHEN SEATTLE WAS A BATTLEFIELD, P16

20 years on, a look back at the protest that helped launch a global justice movement.

## BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON, P18

Believers in this ancient religion from Iraqi hold water sacred. Now in exile they face a barren future.

## GLOBAL BRIEFS, P19

The world's on fire in more ways than one.

## WHERE BEING GAY IS A DEATH SENTENCE, P 20

Homophobia stoked by U.S. evangelicals makes life a terror for LGBTQ Ugandans.

## RISE UP SINGING, P21

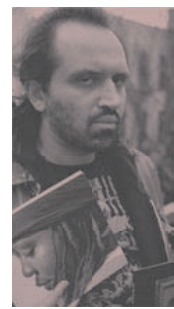
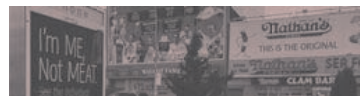
The Die Jim Crow project is changing prisoners' lives and challenging mass incarceration.

## MUSIC BELONGS TO EVERYONE, P22

Ian Brennan knocks pop stars off their pedestals with his new book.

## TRUMP HELP HOTLINE, P23

Rev Billy on free speech + holiday advice for dealing with Trump-loving relatives.



**YOU'RE INVITED!**  
Saturday, Dec. 7, 2019, 9:30am-4pm


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PETER RUGH

# BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

## WE INTERRUPT YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED PROGRAMMING

WBAI-99.5 FM is back on the air. The local community station was abruptly shut down in September by the Pacifica Foundation, which holds its license to operate, but on Nov. 6, NY State Supreme Court Judge Melissa Crane issued an order requiring Pacifica's interim executive director, John Vernile, and a portion of its board of directors who together led the shutdown effort to return the station to local control. Founded in 1946 as the world's first listener-sponsored radio network, Pacifica also has left-leaning stations in Washington, D.C., Houston, Los Angeles and the Bay Area, as well as more than 100 affiliate stations across the country. On Oct. 13, Pacifica's national board voted 12-9-1 to reverse WBAI's closure and to fire Vernile. Vernile and his rogue faction of supporters on the board refused to honor the board majority's decision.

## UNCHARTERED TERRITORY

Five changes to NYC's charter were overwhelmingly approved at the polls on Nov. 5, including ranked-choice voting (RCV) and police disciplinary reforms. The electoral reform means that when NYC residents vote in local elections they'll be able to rank candidates in order of preference, instead of just choosing one. If no one wins the majority of the top tier, the candidate who received the least top tier votes is eliminated while the votes for the remaining candidates on the next tier down are tallied, and so on until someone reaches 51 percent. Another measure brings changes to the Civilian Complaint Board. The board is now empowered to subpoena officers and investigate potential perjury committed by cops in order to more aggressively weed out wrongdoing at the NYPD. The Police Benevolent Association vehemently opposed the measure, claiming it was anti-cop.

## POLICE COMMISH DECIDES TO BAIL

NYC Police Commissioner James O'Neill abruptly resigned this month, after reportedly grumbling about recent criminal justice reforms. According to the *New York Post*, O'Neill was particularly peeved at Albany's nixing of the cash bail requirement for nonviolent offenses and most misdemeanors that is going into effect next year, and at a "raise the age" initiative that lets juveniles avoid jail. "It's only gonna get worse," O'Neill was heard repeatedly saying in the weeks leading up to his resignation, the *Post* reports. For his replacement, Mayor Bill de Blasio once again went Irish, selecting the department's chief of detectives, Dermot F. Shea, for the top post. In doing so, it was the third time while in office de Blasio has passed over senior black officers for the job.

## AOC'S 'MODERATE' DEMOCRATIC CHALLENGER

While a gaggle of Republicans are lining up to challenge Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for her Queens-Bronx House seat — and raking in a boatload of donations from right-wing donors nationwide in the process — Bronx City Councilmember Fernando Cabrera has become the first prominent Democrat to hop in the fray. "Only a Democrat is going to be able to defeat her and it's going to be a moderate Democrat," Cabrera told *Politico* after filing paperwork to run in the Democratic primary next June. Video of Cabrera, a pentacostal preacher, praising Uganda, where "Godly people are in government," surfaced in 2014, emerging shortly after the country passed legislation that punished homosexuality with the death penalty (later amended to life in prison). It remains to be seen how much of a chance Cabrera and his so-called "moderate" views stand against his democratic socialist opponent, but Republicans in the race may have found the ultimate get-rich-quick scheme: declare you are running against AOC, go on Fox News and watch the moolah roll in.

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## MASS TRANSIT



DEAN PATTERSON

# MIRACLE ON 14TH STREET

## ADVOCATES WANT TO SEE IT SPREAD ACROSS THE CITY

BY SOPHIA LEBOWITZ

It's eerily quiet on 14th Street these days. You can hear the birds chirp and cross the road without fearing for your life. If transportation advocates get their way, plenty more blocks in New York City will be free from the clog of cars as well.

Ridership of the M14 bus route that stretches down 14th Street has been declining for years but, on Oct. 3, New York City's Department of Transportation (DOT) made a drastically pro-commuter change: it took cars off of the road.

The decision was based on a 2016 plan for the impending L train shutdown and was meant to encourage those who previously used the L to get crosstown to take the bus instead. Even after it turned out the L would keep operating during repairs, the plan for the busway remained the same.

DOT faced constant resistance to the plan, mostly from drivers and those living on surrounding streets who, afraid that by removing cars from 14th Street they would suffer massive congestion, sued. Their legal challenge was rejected by an appellate court judge in September.

"Three years later, one lawsuit down, there is a beautiful, functioning bus and truck priority corridor from Third Avenue to Ninth Avenue in Manhattan," says Chelsea Yamada, Transit Alternative's Manhattan organizer.

Overnight, the M14 went from the slowest bus in Manhattan to the only one unaffected by car traffic. Weekdays between the hours of 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., the M14 is in a transit-utopia, sharing the road solely with bike messengers and delivery trucks along 14th Street.

"It is now nothing short of a tremendous success," says Danny Pearlstein of Riders Alliance, a straphangers advocacy group.

In areas that can be classified as transit deserts, buses like the M14 are a vital form of transportation.

"Buses typically cater to markets that are traditionally underserved by the subway," says Yamada.

The M14 specifically serves inbound and outbound commuters from the Lower East Side, where there are not many other options for those commuting throughout the city, especially those travelling across town.

**CAR FREE:** *It's never been easier to get around on 14th St. in lower Manhattan.*

Yet riders aren't the only ones benefiting from the car-free transit corridor. Delivery workers are

having a much easier time getting New Yorkers what they need. Jim, a driver who makes drop-offs to the Garden of Eden Grocery Store on 14th and 6th Avenue feels the change.

"It's more convenient and there's more space," he tells *The Independent*.

For cyclists doing deliveries on crowded, and at times hostile, Manhattan streets, 14th has become a breath of fresh air and a great way to cut across town to avoid congestion and the danger that it brings for those on a bike.

"The busway has tremendously helped both pedestrians and cyclists," says Gareth Coco, a bicycle delivery worker from Sunset Park. "There's less gridlock, so I'm able to get through seamlessly. I've noticed as well other cyclists acknowledging the traffic lights. They'll actually come to a red light and allow pedestrians to cross."

There are still skeptics out there though data from the traffic analytics firm INRX shows that the fears of residents on surrounding streets were unfounded. There has been only a marginal difference in average traffic speeds on 12th, 13th, 15th and 16th Streets since the busway opened.

This singular transit corridor may not seem like a huge move by the DOT but it is setting a new tone in policy after the department's long history of disappointing commuters.

Average speeds on the M14 had dropped to 4.5 miles per hour prior to the creation of the busway. Riders were fleeing. Yamada notes that "one in four bus riders from 2017 stopped riding the bus because they lost faith in a failing bus line. There were about 10,000 riders that stopped using that bus since 2017."

All eyes are on 14th Street now. If ridership increases and trust begins to be restored in the MTA, the DOT will have all the more reason to revive other routes in a similar fashion.

"The city should absolutely be considering other major streets for conversion to busways, or transit and truck priority routes like 14th Street," says Pearlstein. "These could include other Manhattan cross-streets as well as Fordham Road in the Bronx, Northern Boulevard in Queens and Nstrand Avenue in Brooklyn."

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DIRECTED BY: MICHAEL RUF

NOV. 21, 2019 | 7 PM

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BOOK LAUNCH: *Big Pink Meat* is a comic dystopian tale of a teen trans boy who gets his start in life working the graveyard shift at a Danish ham factory.

WED NOV 20 • 7-9:30PM

MAGAZINE LAUNCH: Join us for a reading and discussion organized by Pino, a recently launched biannual print magazine of gay communism.

FRI DEC 6 • 7-9:30PM

TALK: Olympian Wyomia Tyus joins sports writer Dave Zirin to discuss her new memoir about her radical 1960s activism.

## MASS INCARCERATION



TYRONE WALLACE

# 4 NEW JAILS FOR \$10 BILLION

## NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST IN COMMUNITY INITIATIVES NOT CAGES

BY ALEX VITALE

The Oct. 17 vote by the City Council to fund the construction of at least four new jails in New York City brought to a head a long simmering division within the criminal-justice-reform community. On the one side, the Close Rikers campaign advocated for closing the Rikers Island jail complex as a moral imperative driven by the experiences of the people incarcerated there. It was supported by foundations and service providers looking to shrink the size of the jail system and improve conditions. On the other side, is the No New Jails movement that is skeptical of the deal to build new jails first in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, and close Rikers 10 years later. It rejects the premise that new jails can be "more humane" than old ones, and argued that the focus should be on reducing the number of people incarcerated low enough to close Rikers without building new jails.

In the end, the Council voted overwhelmingly to build the new jails, at a cost of close to \$10 billion, with only minimal new investment in community-based initiatives and an easily reversible zoning change that in theory will prohibit Rikers Island from hosting a jail beginning in 2027. The current borough jails will be closed, and prisoners housed there will be moved to Rikers. As the new jails open, prisoners will be moved out of Rikers and the island will eventually be developed for other purposes.

There are currently about 7,000 people being held at Rikers, down from as many as 20,000 in the 1990s. The Department of Corrections has a budget of close to \$1 billion a year and it's estimated that each bed at Rikers costs over \$200,000 a year to operate. The new jails are expected to hold up to about 3,300 people as opposed to the current non-Rikers capacity of 2,600.

In addition to new "better designed" jails in the four largest boroughs, the plan also calls for the creation of new "hospital" and youth and women jails. The city Department of Corrections will continue to be in charge of running these facilities, despite the protests of the Close Rikers campaign about its long history of abuse and corruption.

Advocates and service providers such as The Fortune Society, Osborne Association, and Brooklyn Defender Services have insisted that new jails are necessary to make the conditions of incarceration consistent with basic human rights standards and that improvements in conditions and services are key demands of their incarcerated clients. These include ending the use of solitary confinement, access to better medical services, and increased rehabilitation programming. Placing people in jails in the boroughs facilities also means they will be closer to their homes, which

should make visitation easier.

Some former members of the Close Rikers movement such as the Bronx Defenders and VOCAL-NY pulled out because they felt that the plan lacked any real investment in new community based services such as affordable housing and community-based mental health programs. They also objected to spending money on building institutions that they view as fundamentally harmful.

Both coalitions are philosophically opposed to the use of jails and police to solve what they believe are at root community problems, and support commu-

nity investments outside of those institutions. Their disagreement rested largely on the strategic question of whether building new jails would undermine efforts to invest in community-based strategies or even fail to result in closing the Rikers jail complex.

Both have issued powerful policy statements about the need to invest in communities and individuals instead of the criminal-justice system. Close Rikers undertook a major initiative to consult with nonprofit organizations and community members about the kinds of investments that would create healthier and safer communities. The result was their "Build Communities" document, which lays out specific programmatic interventions in the areas of public health, housing, employment, education, and building non-carceral community infrastructures that could be paid for by ending our reliance on police and jails.

No New Jails' "Close Rikers Now, We Keep Us Safe" plan makes similar proposals, but also points to non-police public-safety programs to address interpersonal conflict such as Sista to Sista's "Liberated Ground" and the Audre Lorde Project's "Safe Outside the System" initiative. Both of these rely on community-based strategies of public education, conflict mediation, and mutual support.

The plan also calls for ending "broken windows" policing, getting police out of schools, and removing police from mental-health crisis calls.

Now that the deal to approve new jails has been approved, both campaigns have indicated their intention to mobilize in favor of their respective community-investment initiatives and to hold the city to its pledge to close Rikers.

One hopes the two sides can be drawn together on a unified platform, given how similar their proposals are. Close Rikers could bring its extensive coalition-building capacity to bear, while No New Jails could expand on its focus on grassroots mobilization and community-building efforts. But will major funders like the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations, along with established institutional players like the Vera Institute, the Fortune Society and the Osborne Association, which are tied to providing services within the jails, remain committed to supporting such a movement with the same enthusiasm they showed for the new jails plan?

Alex Vitale is Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of the Policing and Social Justice Project at Brooklyn College and the author of *The End of Policing* (Verso Press).





CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

# SECOND FOUNDING OF A NATION

## THE LEGACY OF RECONSTRUCTION LIVES ON IN TODAY'S POLITICAL DEBATES

BY THEODORE HAMM

Who is entitled to the full rights of citizenship? And who is not? These questions are once again roiling U.S. politics in the Trump era. In his new book, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, the eminent U.S. historian Eric Foner examines the passage of the 13th and 15th Amendments and subsequent efforts by the Supreme Court to undermine their impact. Taken together, the 13th, abolishing slavery; the 14th, establishing the rights of citizenship; and the 15th, ensuring that former male slaves could vote marked a vast expansion of formal equality in the United States. At the time, Republican leader Carl Schurz referred to the amendments as both a “second founding” and a “Constitutional revolution.” As the reactionary current Supreme Court threatens the protections established during Reconstruction for African Americans and immigrants, Foner’s work provides a necessary exploration of how those rights originated.

**THE INDEPENDENT:** *In the wake of Ava Duvernay’s 2016 documentary 13th, the popular understanding is that it while eliminated slavery, the amendment ushered in forced prison labor, eventually allowing for the growth of mass incarceration. Can you explain the wording?*

ERIC FONER: The 13th Amendment states “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall exist, except as punishment for crime.” Until recently, that criminal exemption clause was totally ignored. At the time the amendment was passed, it wasn’t debated in Congress or mentioned in the press. It was almost like boilerplate language, and most Northern state constitutions had similar provisions. In the 1860s there were hardly any prisons or prisoners. Unfortunately, the language created a loophole that allowed the Southern states to establish a giant system of convict labor, with prisoners, mostly African American, being rented out via convict leasing to mines and factories and treated very harshly. But it wasn’t a conspiracy created at the time of the 13th Amendment’s passage.

*Prior to Reconstruction, how was citizenship defined?*

It was not very well-defined. But the general opinion was that if you were born in the United States, you were a citizen — as long as you were white. There was clearly a racial definition of citizenship, starting with the first Naturalization Act in

1790, which said that only white immigrants could become naturalized citizens, through the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision of 1857, which declared that no black person, free or enslaved, could become a citizen. The anti-slavery movement and free blacks themselves fought vigorously for a non-racial definition, as evidenced by the frequent “Conventions of Colored Citizens.” And during Reconstruction, the 14th Amendment established birthright citizenship, meaning that anybody born in the United States was now considered a citizen — with the exception of Native Americans, who were considered members of their own tribal sovereignties.

*It’s surprising that the 14th — which is the most “active” of the three amendments today — was the least celebrated at the time of its passage.*

When the 13th was passed, people in Congress through their hats in the air and when the 15th was ratified, there were big parades of blacks and whites in the major cities. But with the 14th, there was no celebration and even the people who voted for it viewed it as “this is the best we can do right now.” It didn’t give black men the right to vote, as many Radical Republicans wanted. It also introduced the word male into the Constitution, angering the women’s rights movement. Yet, as you say, the 14th is by far the most relevant to our current Constitutional order. It establishes who is a citizen and what rights will citizens have; and it’s not written in racial language at all — equal protection of the law applies to everyone, including non-citizens. Most recently gay marriage became established as a right under the 14th Amendment. So its coverage has expanded enormously since its original passage but ironically, the amendment has not served African Americans well as of late, as conservatives have used it to attack affirmative action and school desegregation.

*How does the “birthright citizenship” provided by the 14th compare to other democracies?*

No country in Europe today recognizes automatic birthright citizenship. If you are born in France as a child of an immigrant, you are not automatically a French citizen. You can become one through a process of testing and education. But if your parents are French, you are automatically a citizen. Of course, birthright citizenship is under attack right now, with the president wanting to eliminate it for the children of undocumented immigrants. But so far, it has not been rescinded.

*How could it be rescinded?*

There’s an old phrase, “The Constitution is what the Supreme Court says it is.” In *Slaughterhouse* (1873), the Court essentially interpreted the privileges or immunities clause of the 14th Amendment out of existence, by arguing that the rights of federal citizenship didn’t apply to the states. It later nullified the 15th Amendment by upholding state disfranchisement laws. I don’t think many people are confident that the current court would uphold birthright citizenship.

*In the book, you present the 15th Amendment as a com-*

*promise that allowed for the exclusion of various groups. Its final wording is that “no citizens” shall be denied the right to vote on grounds of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”*

The Radical Republicans wanted it to state that “all male citizens” would get the right to vote, as they weren’t yet ready to include women. That would have eliminated all the subsequent subterfuges to restrict the right to vote like poll taxes or literacy tests under Jim Crow, or voter ID requirements today. But the problem was that many northern and western states had restrictions on the right to vote. Rhode Island had a special requirement for immigrants, targeting Irish Catholics by requiring ownership of property; and California didn’t want the Chinese to vote. Yet as long as the qualifications for voting in the states didn’t specify race or color, they were allowed under the 15th Amendment. Denying prisoners the right to vote has also been upheld by the courts, because that’s not technically on the grounds of race or color.

*Taken as a whole, you show that the Reconstruction amendments greatly expanded the power of the federal government over the states.*

Absolutely. Each of the three comes with an enforcement clause, giving Congress the ability to pass legislation to strengthen the application of the amendment. That was unprecedented in our history. Prior to the Civil War, the greatest perceived danger was that the federal government had too much power. For example, the First Amendment begins, “Congress shall make no law...,” thus restricting the federal government from trampling on our civil liberties. States, however, could pass such laws, so you couldn’t give a speech against slavery in South Carolina. But with the Civil War, the states came to be seen as the real danger, because it was state law that had established slavery. The Radical Republican Charles Sumner called the federal government the “custodian of freedom,” meaning that it ideally would ensure that the states didn’t deny the rights established by the three amendments.

*What lessons should we learn from the subsequent attacks on the amendments?*

To use an old phrase from the 19th century, “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” Rights in the Constitution are not self-enforcing. While the Reconstruction amendments remained in place throughout the entire period of segregation, they were nullified in the South with the acquiescence of the rest of the country. The era we’re living in now is similar to the late 19th century, with principles that seemed well-established under attack and in danger of being rescinded by the courts. As an historian, not a legal scholar, I’m not looking at precedents. I’m showing what the Reconstruction amendments were intended to accomplish. We don’t need to accept the Supreme Court’s subsequent interpretations as the true meaning of them.

**MAKING HISTORY:** *Historian Eric Foner’s latest book explores how three constitutional amendments passed during Reconstruction transformed America.*





JACOB SPETZLER



JACOB SPETZLER

# HOMEOWNERS GONE WILD

## A PROPOSED HOMELESS SHELTER IN GLENDALE HAS THE MAJORITY-WHITE COMMUNITY ON EDGE

BY RICO CLEFFI

**H**omeowners in opposition to homeless shelters in Queens have become increasingly militant over the last few years, adopting confrontational tactics and violent rhetoric. Eschewing the usual talk of quality-of-life concerns and parking, they have picketed a synagogue and one Ozone Park landlord recently staged a hunger strike. In the Glendale neighborhood, where the city plans to build a shelter for 200 single men, one resident drew robust applause at a Community Board 5 meeting in early October when she declared “I hope somebody’s gonna burn the place down.”

That shelter, planned for a former factory at 78-16 Cooper Avenue, is one of two the city plans on bringing to the area. The other facility, which would house 132 homeless families, will be at 1616 Summerfield Street, in nearby Ridgewood, and is scheduled to open late next year.

Glendale, a quiet lower-middle-class neighborhood of 35,000 people, is on Queens’ southwestern edge, separated on the south from Brooklyn’s East New York by a belt of cemeteries, separated from Middle Village to the north by more cemeteries and isolated from the city in general by its lack of subway service.

Having resisted both white flight and gentrification, Glendale is one of the city’s few remaining white-ethnic neighborhoods. It’s worth pointing out that the proposed Cooper Avenue shelter is roughly 10 blocks from the home of Archie Bunker in “All in the Family.”

### POLITICS OF FEAR

The kind of organized reactionary populism on display in Queens has largely dwindled in the face of changing demographics. Brooklyn’s Bensonhurst is now as well-known for Asian restaurants as it once was for the racist murder of Yusuf Hawkins in 1989. Canarsie, where in 1972 white parents pulled their kids out of the schools in opposition to desegregation, is now close to 85 percent black with a large Caribbean homeowning population. Ridgewood, just west of Glendale, was once almost all white, but is now home to Latinos, Muslim immigrants and artists crossing the border from Bushwick in search of cheaper rent.

But Glendale, along with neighboring Maspeth and Middle Village, has historically been conservative. In the 1990s mayoral elections, Rudolph Giuliani won more than 85 percent of the vote there. In 2016, Glendale and Middle Village were among the few city neighborhoods where Donald Trump won a significant number of precincts.

Homeless shelters are a major issue for members of the area’s various property-owner groups. At a recent hearing the area’s City Councilmember Bob Holden recommended that residents opposed to the shelter join the 104th Precinct Civilian Observation Patrol (104 COP), formerly the Glendale Civilian Observation Patrol (GCOP).

Formed in 1976 as nearby Bushwick burned, 104 COP patrols the neighborhood nightly, and operates on a broken-windows philosophy. It sees quality-of-life crimes, especially graffiti, as a gateway to drugs, prostitution and a general slide into lawlessness. The group works closely with the Police Department’s 104th Precinct and claims to have undergone homeland security and antiterrorism training.

“I’d be curious to learn the data on how many calls originating from GCOP result in arrest and who exactly is targeted,” says Caty Seger, a mem-

ber of the Ridgewood Tenants Union (RTU) who grew up, and currently lives in Glendale. “There’s always been a notion that neighborhoods like Glendale have to be ‘protected’ from the rest of the city. Coded in that is the idea that the people it needs protecting from are poor, mostly black and brown people, immigrants and the homeless.”

Councilmember Holden came out of the property-owners movement; for decades he ran the Juniper Park Civic Association in Middle Village. Originally a Democrat, he ran as a Republican on an anti-shelter platform in 2017, beating incumbent Elizabeth Crowley after losing the Democratic primary to her. Crowley was hardly pro-shelter, but her political pragmatism led many in the district to view her opposition as not strong enough. Holden says the Cooper Avenue site should be used as a school for special-education children.

In April, one homeowner group, the Glendale Middle Village Coalition protested outside a Long Island synagogue whose president is the landlord of the Cooper Avenue site. Though Holden, a former member of the coalition, condemned the protest, its organizers praised him while condemning his fellow Queens Councilmember Rory Lancman, who criticized the rally.

Praising the involvement of his “many Jewish neighbors” in his anti-shelter drive, Mike Papa, one of the organizers, told the *Queens Ledger* that Lancman was “probably just using this situation to get his name in print.”

“I will not allow him to turn this peaceful rally to promote a plan sponsored by our District Councilman Robert Holden to build a school for handicapped children in our community into another fabricated case of anti-Semitism,” Papa added.

Shelter opponents often tout the “school” — which Holden claims Mayor Bill de Blasio personally promised him and which the city denies it has any plans for — as an alternative to the shelter.

Papa, a grandfather and 25-year Teamster truck driver, told *The Independent* that he now thinks the synagogue picket was “stupid,” and that it wasn’t his idea, although he did say he scouts locations for the group’s protests.

He is convinced the planned shelter will be a “halfway house,” which will bring in “sexual offenders” and other delinquents loosed on to society by recent criminal-justice reforms such as the reduction of bail requirements and the treatment of minor offenses like littering as civil rather than criminal violations.

“There aren’t really going to be any crimes left that are arrestable offenses,” Papa says. “There are going to be thousands of people hitting the streets coming out of jail.”

He has little trust in the motivations of the company slated to run the facility, the nonprofit Westhab, which as this issue went to press was scheduled to have a city review hearing for a \$61 million contract with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) at the Cooper Avenue site. “You look up every single person on their executive board,” Papa says, “and they all sit on the board of one or another real-estate development corporation. That’s what this is all about.”

### ‘SHELTER-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX’

Housing and tenant activist Rob Robinson of the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative acknowledges that there are many problems with the “shelter-industrial complex” that Glendale residents like Papa denounce.

“By putting people in shelters, you’re not getting to the root cause of the problem,” he says.



“People deserve a place to go, a place to stay versus the street, the subway. [But] it’s not a long-term solution. It’s just a temporary solution.” Robinson is adamant, however, that there is a difference between criticizing the shelter system and making excuses for keeping homeless people out of neighborhoods. “If everybody is saying, ‘Not in my backyard,’ what do you do with these people?”

The de Blasio administration’s “Turning the Tide on Homelessness” plan to place homeless shelters across the city was designed to distribute them more equitably, instead of building more shelter beds in the same neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn. The plan also intends to have shelters give priority to people who lived in their neighborhoods before they became homeless. In Queens Community District 5, that would mean people like Arkadiusz Jasinski, a 44-year-old unemployed construction worker who froze to death on a Ridgewood sidewalk last November.

At the October community board meeting where calls were made to burn the shelter down, Raquel Namuche of the RTU urged the crowd to push for affordable housing as the solution to homelessness. She was immediately shouted down.

The very presence of tenant organizers at a Community Board 5 meeting signifies a major change for Ridgewood, Glendale and Middle Village.

A neighborhood newspaper, the *Ridgewood Times* (now the *Times Newsweekly*) once railed against welfare recipients, and after 9/11, regularly floated the idea of internment camps for Muslims. Following the 1977 blackout, when heavy looting and arson occurred in Bushwick, it called for more “civic involvement” in white Ridgewood and the surrounding neighborhoods that would “turn back the tide” of chaos from a few M-train stops west. “[I]f Ridgewood falls, it will precipitate

a domino effect, which will spread to Glendale, Maspeth and Middle Village,” it warned.

These days, the *Times Newsweekly* condemns the behavior of the anti-shelter crowd, and recently ran editorials by RTU members making the kinds of arguments about homelessness Namuche was shouted down for.

#### A CHANGING COMMUNITY

Glendale has also changed. Like the rest of Queens, this once majority-German neighborhood has diversified. But while the borough itself is one of the most ethnically varied places on Earth, Glendale is still 56 percent white (a 29 percent decrease from 1990). It is still less than 2 percent black, but the Latino population is now 37 percent and growing.

“Glendale is a lot more than what the anti-shelter crowd has made it seem to be,” says Caty Seger. “It is more diverse, in all ways, than what is usually seen.”

She emphasizes the need for “stronger and more comprehensive rent control,” pointing to the large number of illegal apartment conversions, where homeowners rent out a second floor or basement, throughout the neighborhood.

These units often fall into disrepair, Seger says, and tenants living there without a lease can be easily evicted. “This creates unsafe living conditions for families who don’t always have the power or legal protections to fight back for better housing. There is a great need for housing justice in Glendale, and that includes fighting for our homeless neighbors.”

Rob Robinson became homeless after losing a job, living first on the streets of Miami and later in a New York City shelter. He acknowledges that neighborhoods considered liberal, such as Chelsea and the Upper East Side, have also opposed shelters, while the opposition in west-central Queens arises from more of a working-class viewpoint.

“In a place like Glendale [people think], ‘I worked

hard to get my home, you need to work hard to get yours,’” he says. But he adds, “there are folks working for the city, working for Transit, that are in shelters, people working for HRA [the Human Resources Administration] that are in shelters. We have a big problem in this country, and the wages aren’t rising as fast as rent. People are rent-burdened, and eventually that leads to problems like homelessness.”

In mid-October, Community Board 5 voted to reject the Cooper Avenue shelter, but that vote is only advisory. The DHS has made clear that it will be moving forward with the project. When the shelter comes to Glendale, homeowners are unlikely to stand down, and we can only wonder what type of reception homeless New Yorkers can expect from the neighborhood.

#### ARCHIE BUNKER & CO:

“*All In The Family*” used a house on this Glendale block for its show about a white working class father and his family.

**IRATE:** Longtime Glendale resident Mike Papa is worried that a proposed homeless shelter will make the neighborhood less safe.

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# WHAT'S IN YOUR WATER?

## THE LEAD CRISIS IN NEWARK HAS RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT NYC'S TAPS. HERE ARE THE FACTS.

BY JENNY BLAIR

**L**ast summer, more than 15,000 households in Newark, New Jersey, were forced to drink and cook with bottled water after a change in the city water supply's acidity caused lead from the pipes connecting mains to individual buildings to leach into their tap water.

At least 10 percent of samples taken of the city's water have exceeded the federal Environmental Protection Agency's "action level" of 15 parts per billion for almost three years. In the first six months of this year, the worst 10 percent exceeded 57 ppb, according to the New Jersey Department of Environment Protection.

Could New York City residents also be unknowingly drinking lead from their tap water? Some are. But New York has safeguards Newark didn't, and residents have access to more information about their own water. That includes online maps showing which buildings are served by lead pipes, as well as free on-demand residential lead testing.

Lead exposure is particularly dangerous to children. It can delay their growth and mental development and may cause learning and behavioral problems, according to the New York City Department of Health. In adults, it can cause high blood pressure and brain, kidney and reproductive issues.

WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED IN NEWARK? COULD THAT HAPPEN HERE?

Water was improperly treated at the city's Pequannock treatment plant. The outflow was corrosive enough to leach lead out of old pipes around the city.

The lead pollution catastrophe in Flint, Michigan, was also caused by corroding pipes. To save money, the emergency manager appointed by then-Gov. Rick Snyder after the state took control of the city's finances switched from using Detroit's water supply to pumping water from the Flint River. The city failed to treat that water to neutralize its corrosiveness.

In contrast, "New York City owns and maintains its water-supply system, and it is fiscally sound," Tara Deighan, director of customer engagement at the city DEP, told *The Independent* in an email. "We are committed to transparency, regularly posting testing data on NYC OpenData, in reports, and communicating it to environmental stakeholders and citizens."

OpenData includes a publicly searchable database of DEP's lead-testing results around the city.

"As long as DEP is professional and scientific, the lead threat to New York City is minimal," said Dan O'Flaherty, an economist at Columbia University who has written about Newark's lead crisis in the *Newark Star-Ledger*. "Newark tested exactly 25 observations of Pequannock water between 2012 and 2016. New York tests 5,000 a year of its system.

"I don't think [DEP's] current management would come close to failing, because they're real pros," O'Flaherty added. "The real danger would be a major change for the worse in DEP management."

HOW DOES NEW YORK CITY WATER GET CONTAMINATED WITH LEAD?

When our water arrives in pipelines beneath city streets after a long journey from reservoirs upstate, it's lead-free.

But despite preventive treatment at a plant, it can still pick up lead once it leaves the water main and travels through service lines

and through buildings' plumbing.

There are 130,000 privately owned lead service lines in the city, the DEP estimates. Some homes' pipes, fixtures, and solder contain lead as well. Building new lead service lines was legal in the city until 1961, as were patches to them until 2009, according to LeadFreeNYC.

DOES MY TAP WATER CONTAIN LEAD? IF SO, WHAT CAN I DO?

City residents can check the NYC OpenData website to see if their building's water is served by a lead service line (type "lead service line" at [data.cityofnewyork.us](http://data.cityofnewyork.us)).

Residents can call 311 and request a Lead in Drinking Water Test Kit. If the result scores higher than 15 ppb — you're asked to confirm a high reading with a second test — the city offers residents a filter pitcher, according to Michael Liu of the DEP's Lead Unit.

It's important to know that the 15 ppb "action level" is controversial, as no level of lead exposure is considered safe. In Flint in 2014, one-sixth of water samples tested by Virginia Tech University researchers had more than 15 ppb of lead, and more than 40 percent had more than 5 ppb, which the researchers considered an indication of a "very serious" problem, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

In New York, low-income building owners are eligible for financial help to replace private lead service lines. The state's \$20 million Lead Service Line Replacement Program has awarded New York City \$5.3 million, according to its website, updated in August.

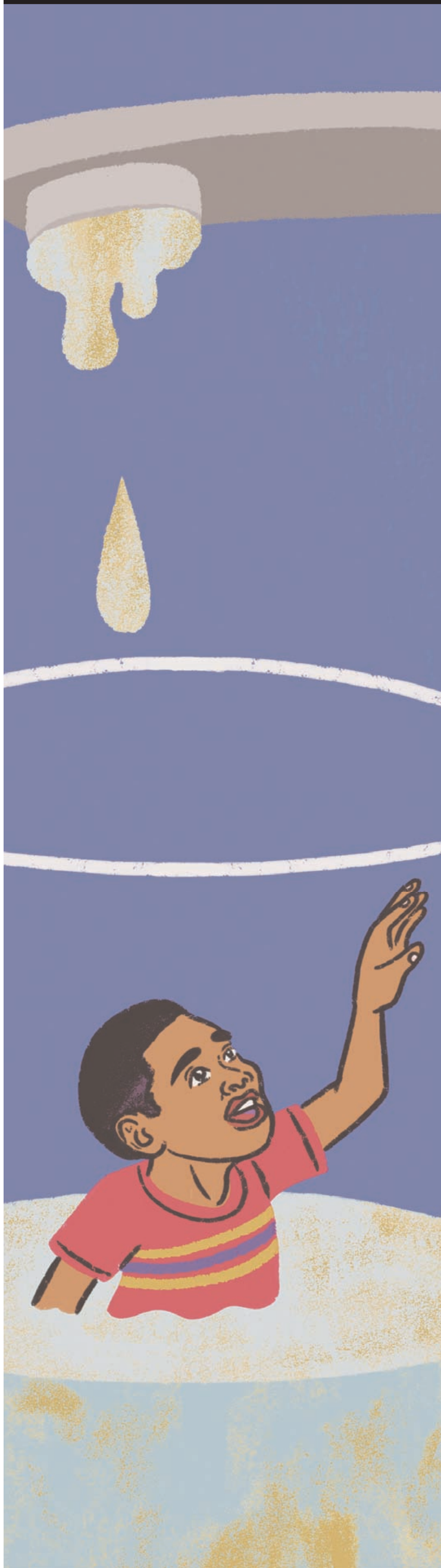
Deighan said the city DEP will begin replacing private lead service lines for low-income homeowners "this year."

BESIDES WATER, WHERE ELSE CAN LEAD APPEAR?

Water isn't the only way children and adults can be exposed to lead. Old lead paint in buildings is a major problem, particularly if it is peeling and within reach of young children. Contaminated soil in backyards, gardens and parks is another potential source. Certain cosmetics from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, such as kohl and vermilion, may contain lead, and skin-lightening creams may also be contaminated, according to LeadFreeNYC.

Lead has also appeared in spices from South Asia and the country of Georgia; in Mexican snacks containing chili or tamarind pulp; in some Ayurvedic remedies; in jewelry and good-luck amulets and some metal toy parts; and in glazed decorative or handmade ceramics, according to the site. LeadFreeNYC offers tips for avoiding exposure.

**NO LEVEL OF EXPOSURE TO THE METAL IS CONSIDERED SAFE.**



DANIEL FISHEL



# NO MORE GAMES

## BROOKLYN DA'S OFFICE ORDERED TO STOP CONCEALING KEY WITNESS INFO

BY THEODORE HAMM

This past June, as *The Indy* reported, New York's Court of Appeals reinstated the Brooklyn murder conviction of John Giuca in a ruling sharply criticized by exoneration advocates for excusing prosecutorial misconduct. In reversing a Brooklyn assault conviction last month, however, the same court staked out a principled pro-defendant position.

Which direction New York's highest court is headed in terms of protecting defendants' rights is not yet clear. But the more recent ruling further illustrates the misdeeds of prosecutor Anna-Sigga Nicolazzi in the Giuca case.

In mid-October, the Court of Appeals unanimously ordered a new trial for Rong He, who was convicted in 2013 for a non-fatal stabbing two years earlier at a Bay Ridge nightclub. Ahead of the trial, He's defense counsel asked prosecutors for contact information for two witnesses, both of whom had told the police that there were two assailants. The statements undermined the DA's argument that He had committed

*Beast*, amid its appeal last year of the 2nd Appellate Division's unanimous reversal of Giuca's murder conviction, the Brooklyn DA's office turned over previously undisclosed evidence to Mark Bederow, Giuca's current lawyer. The new material consisted primarily of a lengthy interview Nicolazzi conducted

with Joseph Ingram, a Rikers cellmate of Giuca, just over two months before the September 2005 trial.

In the tape, Ingram informs Nicolazzi that while en route from Rikers to Bellevue Hospital for medical treatment he sat next to Antonio Russo, who faced trial for the same murder as Giuca. Nicolazzi's theory of the case was that after killing Fairfield University student Mark Fisher, Russo gave the gun to Giuca, who then disposed of it.

Ingram, however, told Nicolazzi that according to Russo, Giuca never received the gun (which was never found). The Court of Appeals did not consider Ingram's statements when it ruled that the most telling evidence of Giuca's guilt was his possession of the murder weapon.

Just before the trial, Nicolazzi placed Ingram on her witness list — a clear sign that she found him to be credible. However, she identified him as "James Ingram," not Joseph. And she didn't provide the tape of the interview to Giuca's defense counsel, as required.

During the trial, Nicolazzi nevertheless declared in court that she had turned over "every statement" by Giuca or Russo. And

## 'THE DA'S OFFICE TALKS DUE PROCESS, BUT THAT'S NOT HOW THE SAUSAGE IS MADE IN BROOKLYN.'

the assault alone.

In response to the defense's request for contact info, prosecutors said that they would contact the witnesses and give them He's lawyer's phone number. The DA's office did not provide evidence that the witnesses were in danger.

At the September oral arguments, Court of Appeals Judge Jenny Rivera immediately asked Brooklyn Assistant District Attorney Seth Lieberman if the procedures in He's case remained the office's policy. Lieberman confirmed that was so but tried to defend the practice on the grounds that it prevented witness tampering. The judges clearly were not impressed. In their October ruling, all seven agreed that the prosecutors' actions amounted to "suppression of the requested information" and thus violated He's rights under the *SCOTUS Brady* decision.

Providing the names of potentially exculpatory witnesses but then obstructing access to them is one way for prosecutors to hide them in plain sight. As documented in the latest filing in the Giuca case, prosecutor Nicolazzi deployed a variation on the same theme.

As Hella Winston reported in the *Daily*

just before her summation, she announced that she would not be calling "James Ingram" to the stand.

By first misnaming Ingram, then never calling him to testify, Nicolazzi thwarted any attempts by Giuca's trial lawyer Sam Gregory to speak with Ingram, who could have explained what he told Nicolazzi. Such chicanery is another way for a prosecutor to hide an exculpatory witness in plain sight.

In response to the Court of Appeals' Rong He ruling, the DA's office tells *The Indy* that "We are adjusting our practice in accordance with the new [discovery] law that affords the defense access to witnesses' contact information." The law takes effect on Jan 1.

Even so, as Giuca's appeals attorney Mark Bederow notes, the DA's appeals bureau continues to defend convictions that involved various dubious practices, including those of both He and Giuca. "The office talks up due process in its 'Justice 2020' vision," Bederow says, "but that's not how the sausage is made in Brooklyn."

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# EAT YOUR VEGGIES OR WE'RE ALL BBQ

ON A WARMER PLANET WITH MORE PEOPLE, EATING MOSTLY PLANT-BASED FOODS MAY BE CRUCIAL TO OUR SURVIVAL. THANKFULLY, IT'S TASTIER THAN EVER.

BY PETER RUGH

It used to be that the worst thing you had to worry about was chlorinated chicken in your soup, fecal matter in your burger, horse parts in your frankfurter. But nowadays, in this age of climate change, when some of us stare down at our foie gras, we wonder just whose goose is being cooked.

Humanity is in the midst of what the writer William Burroughs might have called our “naked lunch,” that “frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork.” There’s near-universal agreement that fossil fuels are the predominant driver of global warming — i.e. the end of humanity as we know it — but wasteful food production, livestock rearing in particular, is a major contributor as well.

Livestock account for 14.5 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), much of that from methane-belching bovines on industrial farms.

Meanwhile, Earth’s population is expected to expand to nearly 10 billion people by 2050. Already more than one in 10 people are suffering from chronic malnutrition in a global food economy dominated by corporate monoculture farms that actually yield less than their sustainable counterparts. Nevertheless, there’s already enough food produced on this planet to make every single inhabitant overweight, while an international commodities market that monetizes basic staples cultivates artificial scarcity.

So it’s not more of us that is cause for concern, it’s what we are putting in our bellies. With a third of the planet’s cultivable land currently used to grow livestock feed, meaty diets in Western nations are a big part of the waste in our food system.

Enter Beyond Meat and Impossible, two of the leading meat-substitute startups aiming to change our diets. Part of the success of these meatless marvels is that they actually taste good. Unlike the previous generation of vegetarian mock-animal, they have nearly the same flavor and texture as their flesh-and-bone inspirations.

“It’s one thing to say, ‘O.K., eat more plants, put more vegetables on your plate,’” says Richard Waite, a research associate at the World Resources Institute (WRI). “But that advice has been around for a while, and vegetable consumption in the U.S. hasn’t really grown in decades. The fact that these new plant-based meats are now out there and they’re trying to mimic the taste and the feel and the texture of meat and are targeted not only at vegans and vegetarians, but at people that like and enjoy meat, is really interesting. It is easier for the consumer to choose that product, because it tastes just as good as what they’re used to.”

For its burgers, Impossible uses genetically-modified heme, an iron-carrying molecule found in most animal and plant life that it extracts from soy. Beyond Burgers come from non-genetically-modified proteins taken from rice, mung beans and peas. Both products look like meat and taste a hell of a lot like it too. They even bleed something resembling myoglobin, the “blood” meat excretes when exposed to heat.

This culinary realism has helped Beyond and Impossible’s offerings migrate from the shelves of natural food stores to those of major grocery outlets, and even to the kitchens of fast-food chains like KFC, Burger King and McDonald’s — the kinds of restaurants one in three Americans eat from every single day. Sales of Beyond Meat products, which are more widely available in supermarkets than those of Impossible, have risen by 257 percent over last year,

to \$107.5 million so far in 2019. Restaurant sales of meatless alternatives are up 268 percent, according to the Dining Alliance, a restaurant industry research group.

While picking up supplies for a recent barbecue, this reporter witnessed the mouth-watering allure of these faux fetchings firsthand. Looking around the supermarket, I couldn’t find any veggie burgers or dogs. A clerk pointed me to Beyond’s sausages right next to the traditional brats in the fridge. The things looked so realistic that I worried he had steered me wrong. The vegetarians at the BBQ were suspicious too, even as they devoured what I put on their buns.

Over at my local Burger King, I tried some of this fake meat myself, ordering both an Impossible Whopper and its beefy counterpart. Both were fairly mediocre, assembled and packaged with all the love you’d expect people making a sub-living wage, preparing industrially-processed sandwiches to muster. But the Impossible Whopper was a bit less prosaic. And, while the charbroiled flavor that Burger King markets was more pronounced in the traditional patty, the patty itself was dry and tedious to chew. The Impossible Whopper has nearly the same texture you’d expect from meat, only it’s more succulent. Not bad.

Good enough at least to have ranchers smelling death in the air. Their lobbyists are working diligently to outlaw the use of terms such as burger, jerky and sausage to describe food unless it comes from a living animal. Lawmakers in 25 states have introduced such bills this year, and legislators in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Wyoming, and North and South Dakota have already passed them.

While the cow people beef up their attacks on their leafy competition, major meat companies are getting in on the act. Tyson, Purdue and other food giants unveiled veggie versions of their factory-farmed foods this year. It’s what consumers want and it doesn’t hurt that it helps green up their image after years of exposés of animal cruelty, worker abuse, pollution and general filth at the farms they contract with.

“I’ve been inside those chicken houses with 40,000 chickens, and there’s a guy walking around whose job it is to take the dead ones out,” says Fred Magdoff, professor emeritus of plant and soil science at the University of Vermont. “They’re dying all the time. That’s one of the reasons they’re lacing their feed with antibiotics.”

After Nestlé, the world’s largest food conglomerate, introduced a line of ground beef alternatives it’s calling “Awesome” in September, Magdi Badato, the company’s operations chief, linked them with its recently announced commitment to reach zero emissions by 2050.

Given that its soy and beef suppliers are clearing land in places like the Amazon rainforest for farms and ranches and do not report their emissions, how Nestlé plans to reach zero is a bit of a mystery. In reality, Big Meat isn’t going vegetarian, it’s just adding vegetables to a long line of butchered products. Consumption of meatless meat may go up, but its environmental impact will be meaningless if meat eating continues on its current trajectory.

Globally, meat consumption has risen from about 70 million tons in 1961 to more than 300 million tons today. FAO predicts a 16 percent increase over 2013–2015 levels by 2025.

That’s a tremendous strain on natural resources.

One pound of industrially reared beef requires 1,847 gallons of water, according to the Institute for Water Education, and we eat 68 million tons of it a year. According to a study by the University of Washington’s Department of Animal Sciences, 13.5 pounds of



feed, mainly corn and grain, go into one quarter-pound burger. On average, Americans eat two to three quarter-pounders a week worth of ground beef, leaving the same greenhouse gas footprint as 34 coal-fired power plants.

There are rotational methods of pasturing cattle that can be near carbon-neutral. These draw on the ways ruminants graze in the wild, allowing areas of land to regenerate before the herd returns to them. “If you do that well, you are actually stimulating the growth of the grass,” Magdoff says, “which is stimulating the growth of roots, which is stimulating the sequestering of carbon in the soil. The problem is that it is more costly.”

Hence, grass-fed beef is marketed as a high-end product. Whether this animal-rearing method could be scaled up to meet America’s current dietary habits is another matter as well. Feeding the animals exclusively on grass also requires more space. If all cows reared in the United States were to be raised on grass-fed diets, according to the University of Washington study, more than 200,000 square miles of additional land would be required, the equivalent of Colorado and Wyoming combined.

Most ranchers simply allow their cattle to graze expansively, often on land rented on the cheap from the U.S. government out West. Then, in the months leading up to slaughter, the animals are fed corn and soy grown thousands of miles away in nitrogen fertilizer produced with natural gas.

As countries in the Global South increase in affluence, we are all in deep kimchi if they consume meat in any way like the United States, Europe and Japan. Based on current trends, FAO estimates global meat demand will rise 70 percent by 2050 in order to feed a population of 9.8 billion people. That would require additional agricultural land roughly twice the size of India, a recent WRI report warns.

Feeding the planet based on current agricultural practices, Richard Waite and others write, will “entail clearing most of the world’s remaining forests, wiping out thousands more species, and releasing enough GHG emissions to exceed 1.5°C and 2°C warming targets enshrined in the Paris Agreement — even if emissions from all other human activities were entirely eliminated.”

“The majority of the pasture land in the world is either too dry or too cold to grow trees or crops,” says Waite. “So if we’re looking at a 100 percent vegan scenario, that’s a lot of land that’s going to waste that’s producing food. The issue is today, the expansion of beef production is the number one driver of tropical deforestation. The next biggest driver is the expansion of soy production. It’s going to vegetable oil for cooking, but it’s also going to feed for chickens and pigs and farmed fish, and cows, to a smaller extent.”

Only about 6 percent of the world’s soy is produced directly for human consumption, says Waite, citing industry statistics, and 85 percent goes to animal feed.

Just as the Anthropocene, an era characterized by humans’ ability to impact the climate through greenhouse gas emissions, has meant a new geological epoch for our planet, the extinction of meat from our diets might signal another stage of human evolution. When a cooler climate at the dawn of the Pleistocene epoch began to put forageable fodder in short supply, our hominid ancestors turned to meat at least 2.6 million years ago. That’s when the first stone-tool butchery marks begin appearing on excavated animal bones.

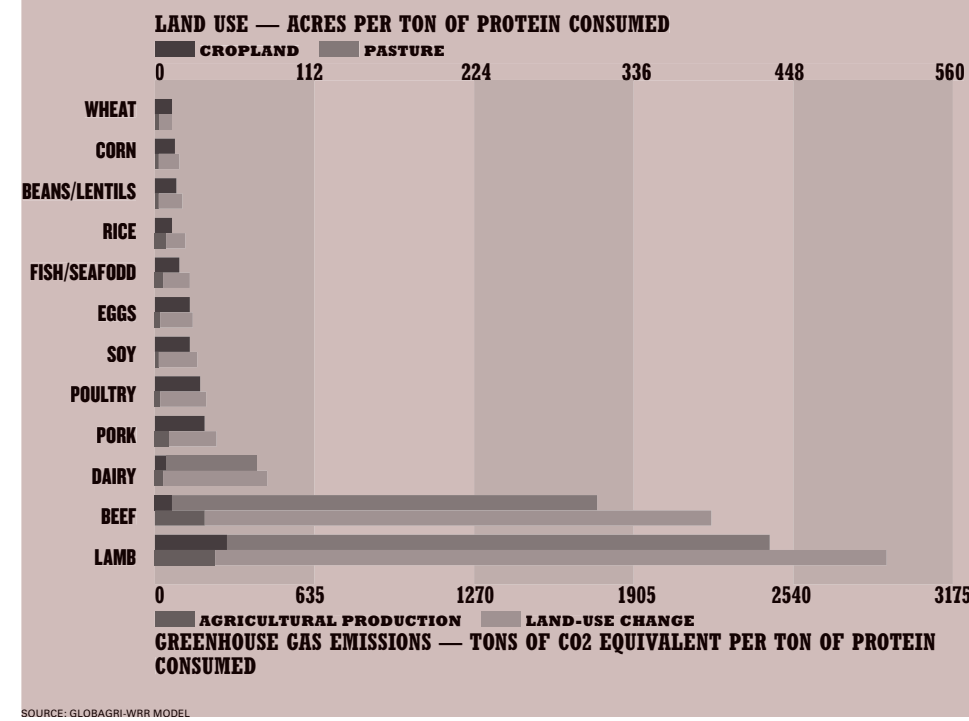
At first we were scavengers, then we became hunters. We see evidence of the first human-controlled fires one to two million years ago. Barbecuing made the flesh go down easier. Homo erectus developed a shorter digestive tract, enabling her to process energy much quicker. This likely led to the increased brain capacity modern humans make use of today.

Our future might just depend on us using these bigger brains to undo the damage we are doing to the climate, a major part of which will be changing the way we eat.

Meat is a very small portion of diets in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where goats and cows are largely used in rural communities as a form of savings and for dowries. In the United States, we’ve followed a different trajectory. The meat industry grew with America’s genocidal path west. Hunter-gatherer communities on the Great Plains were eviscerated to make way for ranchers who shipped their cattle east to the new industrialized meat-processing plants in cities like Chicago.

Poet Carl Sandburg famously described the city as the “Hog Butcher for the World.” In *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair took a less romantic view, depicting the stomach-churning cruelty the slaughterhouses visited on worker and animal alike in vivid detail. The

## BEEF IS MORE RESOURCE-INTENSIVE THAN MOST OTHER FOODS



**FACTORY FARMED:** There are plenty of reasons to eat less meat, animal cruelty is not the least of them.

book inspired more than a few to go vegetarian (and socialist) when it first appeared in 1905. But it did little to stem the tide of cheap protein by then flooding American gullets.

Today we ingest far more meat than our early ancestors ever did, and it is killing us. Researchers have linked red and processed meats to a whole host of illnesses, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, colorectal cancer, dyslipidemia and Type 2 diabetes. Meanwhile, nutritionists generally recommend diets that are low in saturated fat and cholesterol, and high in complex carbohydrates and fiber.

What do you know, as the folks at the Good Food Institute (GFI) point out in a not-yet published report provided to *The Independent*, that Impossible Whopper I ate the other day checks all those boxes when compared to the real thing? Were I to ask that they hold the mayo, it would have contained no cholesterol at all.

While this new generation of meat alternatives may contain veggies, they are still processed foods. Both Beyond and Impossible’s burgers consist of multiple ingredients, including benign additives with scary-sounding names.

Yet think about what goes into the meat most Americans eat. The packaging on that chicken or beef or pork tenderloin you are purchasing may just list the meat itself, but it also contains antibiotics and growth hormones, which are commonly used in the industrial animal-rearing process. Data *Consumer Reports* obtained last year showed that the Department of Agriculture’s Food Safety and Inspection Service found traces in meat of the anesthetic ketamine and phenylbutazone, an anti-inflammatory deemed too risky for humans. In a 2015 study, the publication also found evidence of fecal matter in all 300 samples of ground beef it tested.

By all accounts, plant-based meats are healthier for both the planet and our bodies. But don’t hang your head in shame if you aren’t ready to forsake turkey this Thanksgiving, says Waite.

“It’s more about a rebalancing of what’s on the plate, at least in higher-income countries where we are consuming a lot more meat than we used to,” says Waite. “There’s environmental reasons to do that. There’s health reasons to do that. The world’s a big place: seven, eight, nine, 10 billion people. That’s a lot of people, and there’s all these different cultures. We need to be realistic that not every solution is going to work in every place. There’s always going to be this diversity, and that’s great. But we need to be producing meat as sustainably as possible and, in places where we eat a lot of it, it’s about moderating our consumption. Plant-based meats could have a potentially significant role to play in that.”

Though he suspects meatless meat could just be a fad, Magdoff essentially agrees. However, he does not see a way of fundamentally addressing the climate crisis without sweeping change to our current socioeconomic system.

“You have a system that has to grow and produce more,” he says, “and in the process, it has to convince people to consume more, and what we are consuming and convinced to consume takes fossil fuels to produce.”





CHARLYNE ALEXIS

# IMPEACHING TRUMP IS DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

“**W**e’re going to impeach the motherfucker,” Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich) yelled of President Trump with the gusto of an NFL coach. It took a year and a half but he granted her wish. In a move so blatantly stupid you wonder if the cholesterol from all those Big Macs finally backed up into his brain. Trump called Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on July 25 to trade \$400 million in American military aid for dirt on former Vice President Joe Biden. According to a reconstructed transcript of the call, he said in his fake mafia-style, “I would like you to do us a favor.”

Now he’s being impeached. You can almost see Trump in a bathrobe, fuming at House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on TV and throwing plates, cutlery and Lincoln’s portrait at her. The fear in his eyes is beautiful. Impeachment is needed because the “quid pro quo” of arms for back-channel political dirt is part of a larger attack on democracy. He will try to steal the 2020 election. Impeachment just makes it hard for him to cry foul after his corruption is paraded on national media. If he loses and the Republican Senate goes down with him, we just might have a chance to push for real progressive policy.

## THE RIGHT STUFF

Trump is terrified of losing. The Republicans are terrified of losing. They are like a pair of sweaty gamblers hunched over the roulette wheel with their life savings riding on this last turn. They risked everything on this presidency. It was, they believed, the last chance to take power and keep it before America is too diverse, too liberal, too poor

and too panicked by the climate crisis to buy into small-government conservatism. The mood pre-2016 election was summed up in a hyperventilating essay, “The Flight 93 Election,” where Marc Anton, who later worked in the Trump White House, compared the right to passengers charging the cockpit of a jet hijacked by terrorists, a.k.a. the left, in order to take control. He wrote doozies like “America and the West are on a trajectory toward something very bad.”

In such an existential moment, who needs rules? So Trump threw them out and his base doesn’t care if he throws out democracy too. It’s the story of his life. Trump tossed

aside contracts, debt and wives while bouncing on dad’s wealth from scandal to scandal. Same with the presidency. Political correctness? Fuck it. Human decency? Why bother. He wooed Republican voters tired of the new “rules” on race and gender, tired of playing by the “rules” only to be fired as the factory relocated. All fine and good, until he used the Constitution as a gambling chip. Trump conjured up millions of fake illegal voters to explain his popular vote loss to Clinton. He tried to push a citizenship question onto the census to scare off non-citizens and redraw the electoral map to boost Republicans. He stoked violence in his devotees, who mailed bombs to his critics or shot up Black churches, Jewish synagogues and Latino families. He threatened violence if the GOP lost the midterms. He turned to foreign nations, first Russia and now Ukraine, to interfere in our elections.

Trump, the Republican Party and its voters are locked in one of the riskiest gambles in the history of the republic. They bet on a high-stakes con man and, if he loses in 2020, they’ll try to turn over the table to avoid paying up. Democrats have to impeach. The House of Representatives laid down the law, saying if you lose, pay up and leave or get your legs broken.

## FEET OF CLAY

Maybe the worst part of the Trump presidency is seeing liberals pull their hair as they roam from town to town in sackcloth and ashes, bleating the same monotonous question, “But how do we beat him?”

Yes, Trump yells insanely into any hot microphone like a WWE wrestler. Yes, he rides golden escalators and golden jets. Yes, at rallies, he swivels his iguana-like head to the roar of proto-fascist America. But look closer! Trump is

like a statue with feet of clay, the famous image found in the *Book of Daniel*, “Before you stood a large statue... The head was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet of iron and clay. A rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet and smashed them.” Trump can fall, easily. He stands on a shrinking base and as he flails, he gets close to tipping over.

He is a weak figurehead. He never won the popular vote. He won the Electoral College. Hurtling at his face is another Blue Wave. Angry women have turned Republican suburbs Democratic. Add to that seven million new young voters energized by protests against mass shootings and the climate crisis. Now he is losing support from his own. Farmers are pissed that his trade war with China wrecked their livelihoods. Republican Senators hate the guy. Former Senator Jeff Flake said, “at least 35” would vote to impeach him if they could vote in private. Republicans got the tax cuts, deregulation and judges they wanted. But the price for keeping him in office gets higher and higher every time he tweets.

## IMPEACH THE MOTHERFUCKER

Impeachment is the curtains being pulled back on underground gambling as the players blink in the sunlight and grab their chips. It is a dynamic force that changes the status quo as crime after crime is exposed. And they are panicking.

The more impeachment gains momentum, the more Republicans realize their backs are against the wall. The House will vote to impeach. The nation will turn its eyes to the Republican-led Senate, which will acquit him. Trump will stay in office but weakened. Republicans have the Senate but are discredited. If Bernie Sanders or Elizabeth Warren capitalize on that fiasco, hold up the evidence to show that the White House and Senate are willing to subvert democracy itself, it can add fuel to social movements. Seeing Republican fingerprints on the knife intended to cut voters out may trigger a larger turnout. But only if impeachment is not seen as an insiders’ game but as part of a political revolution to overturn our American oligarchy.

The Ukraine call to enlist foreign election tampering, alongside domestic voter suppression, makes painfully clear the utter contempt Republicans have for democracy. It’s as obvious as a cross burning on a lawn. Only a deep racism, a deep classism and deep sexism can let them think it is cool to gamble with our lives. We have to stop playing games with them. We have to put Trump and his crew where they belong. In jail.



# INSIDE THE DEMOCRATS' LONG CIVIL WAR

*We've Got People: From Jesse Jackson to AOC, the End of Big Money and the Rise of a Movement*

BY RYAN GRIM

STRONG ARM PRESS, 2019

By Steven Sherman

Like many leftists of his generation, Ryan Grim, 41, cut his teeth on street confrontations with the police during the global-justice movement of the late 1990s. Unlike most of his comrades, he went on to focus his attention on Washington politics, becoming Washington bureau chief for the *Huffington Post* and *The Intercept*. He draws on that knowledge for his new book on the transformation of the Democratic Party, *We've Got People: From Jesse Jackson to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the End of Big Money and the Rise of a Movement*.

Grim begins his story with the Rev. Jesse Jackson's campaigns for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988, which have been largely forgotten by the new generation of electoral activists. He roots those races, which tried to build a "rainbow coalition" of African Americans, labor and the Democrats' left-liberal wing, in Harold Washington's successful 1983 insurgent campaign for mayor of Chicago. He celebrates the Jackson campaign's ability to defy the Democratic establishment, along with the future members of Congress who participated—such as Reps. Barbara Lee and Maxine Waters of California, the late Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone and Bernie Sanders.

But soon Grim refocuses on the mainstream of the Democratic Party, which in the 1980s perceived itself as too beholden to black people and out of touch with white men. Furthermore, as the Republicans opened themselves up to a flood of big-money donations, so did the Democrats. The party's overconfidence that it had a permanent majority in the House would be shattered in the 1994 midterms.

After laying out this glum picture, Grim focuses on the first two decades of the new millennium. He writes with both anger and detail of the Democrats' failure to move a genuinely progressive agenda in 2009 and 2010, when they held control over the presidency and both houses of Congress. Former Rep. Rahm Emanuel, Obama's future chief of staff, is a key villain, as his strategy in 2006, when the Democrats won back the House, was finding relatively conservative, donor-friendly candidates to run in swing districts. Obama followed a parallel trajectory, hemming himself in with Wall Street-friendly advisors. One of the most vivid images Grim paints of this period is of the House Finance Committee, bloated with new members because being on it helped them fundraise from the industry they were supposed to be regulating. Taking office during the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, they often voted

down common-sense reforms that threatened their donors' wealth.

On the other hand, former Democratic Senate leader Harry Reid emerges as a sympathetic figure, one willing to learn from the new "netroots," as does Elizabeth Warren, struggling against the Wall Streeters who dominated the Obama administration. Gay and lesbian activists also had some success pressuring the

Obama administration, rather than be hemmed in by its co-opting strategies.

For Grim, the most important aspect of Bernie Sanders'

left in a predominantly rural southeastern Pennsylvania district, backed by the remarkable group Lancaster Stands Up, and Jahana Hayes of Connecticut, who upset the Democratic party's official choice in the primary to become the state's first African American woman House member.

The travails of EMILY's List, so reluctant to break with the establishment even in a year of insurgent women, are also discussed. New Yorkers will likely learn some things from his chapters on Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and

## PEOPLE VS BIG

**MONEY:** *Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez campaign in Queens this October in front of a crowd of 26,000.*

the unseating of the Independent Democratic Conference, the eight Democratic state senators who allied themselves with Republicans and gave the GOP veto power over state government. While Grim is optimistic about the insurgency within the Democratic Party, he is well aware of the continued power of big money. In the epilogue, he worries that Democratic primary voters will try to play it safe and pick former Vice President Joe Biden, who might actually be the worst choice to run against Trump.

Histories of the present are inevitably likely to need revising, but I suspect Grim's work will stand up better than many. His reporting on Congress and electoral politics is filled with surprises and valuable inside information.

However, it is weaker in describing the Democratic insurgency's social underpinnings. For example, he doesn't go into how Jesse Jackson swiftly dismantled the Rainbow Coalition organization, an act many activists remember with bitterness. He mentions the Working Families Party and the Democratic Socialists of America only in passing, although they have produced two important strategies. The WFP has attempted to forge an alliance of labor unions and progressive activists to back candidates, sometimes making unsavory endorsements in order to do so. The DSA has blossomed as a socialist organization with numerous vibrant chapters all over the country, and has fielded many candidates for local offices.

Pretty much the only social analysis Grim has of the insurgency is his Tocquevillian celebration of the local associations that Indivisible rested

upon. This raises the question of how movements can reach the large number of working-class Americans who have experienced social breakdown amid the decline of unions, organized religion and the traditional family. Both Trump and Sanders have shown some ability to reach them, but holding them will take different strategies than simply building on pre-existing organizations, and it's not clear whether the left has the edge on the far right there. A much closer look at the "rise of a movement" from a social perspective would be a highly useful complement to Grim's political perspective, although that's probably too much to ask from one book.



SUE BRISK

historic presidential campaign in 2016 was not his democratic socialist label, but his reliance on small donations and the barnstorming strategy developed to mobilize volunteers. This way of doing politics would be embraced by resistance groups, such as Indivisible, that sprang up after Donald Trump's victory, many of them led by women.

Grim emphasizes their base in associations that already existed, such as book clubs. He also argues that while many activists voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 primaries, they and Sanders' supporters often had a similar political agenda. In discussing the Congressional campaigns of the 2018 midterms, he treats the unsuccessful centrists Jon Ossoff in Georgia and Beto O'Rourke in Texas more positively than most leftists would. He also highlights Jess King running from the



# THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE, 20 YEARS LATER

BY JOHN TARLETON

Early on a cold gray morning 20 years ago this month, a modest procession of people left a church in downtown Seattle heading for the nearby convention center. There were about 80 people in the group. They walked quietly, each person lost in a moment of personal reflection. Above them were bobbed several brightly-painted paper mache monarch butterflies attached to long metal wires, a visual cue for anyone who became separated from the group.

The rain-soaked streets were empty yet everyone waited patiently for the lights to turn green so they could cross together. When they reached the intersection of Sixth Avenue and Union Street, they came upon a line of police passively standing on the far side of the intersection. The activists filled the intersection. Some sat down on the wet pavement and locked arms. Others began dancing and drumming. The paper mache butterflies hovered high overhead.

I was one of the people sitting down and locking arms. Other similarly organized groups of protesters seized intersections around the Washington State Convention and Trade Center. We were intent on shutting down the opening session of the World Trade Organization ministerial conference. An hour later thousands of more marchers arrived en masse from the north and the west. Downtown Seattle was now clogged with protesters who were chanting, dancing and singing. Giant paper mache puppets that bobbed above the festive crowd. When WTO delegates tried to enter the convention center, they were met with a wall of people who would not budge for them.

This surreal carnival of resistance was interrupted by stun grenades, rubber bullets, pepper spray, clouds of tear gas, and screams and tears, as the police unleashed their “less-than-lethal” arsenal upon us. But, it was too late to salvage the opening day of the summit. Demonstrations would continue throughout the week while more than 500 protesters were arrested.

Late on the final night of the WTO summit, hundreds of us who were holding a vigil outside the King County Jail for our detained comrades received stunning news. Talks on a new global trade pact had collapsed. A huge roar went up in the air. Delegates from the African nations had united and refused to be strong-armed into a bad deal by the United States and its European allies, citing the protests outside to underscore how unpopular the WTO’s agenda was even in the U.S. Victory never tasted so sweet.

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THE SEATTLE WTO PROTESTS were the product of months and years of very deliberate organizing and movement building, though at the end of the placid 1990s they seemed to come out of nowhere. In fact, the target for the largest eruption of mass civil disobedience in the United States since the end of the Vietnam War was a Geneva, Switzerland-based entity unknown to most Americans.

The World Trade Organization was launched by member nations in 1995 with a seemingly innocuous mandate to expand global trade. But under its rules, trans-national corporations could sue individual nation states over labor, environmental, public health and consumer protection laws that violated their “right” to maximize return on investment. When found guilty by the WTO’s secret tribunals — invariably the case — countries were subjected to onerous penalties until they repealed the laws in question.

When delegates to the WTO from more than 130 nations gathered in Seattle, it was expected they would hammer out an agreement on a sweeping new trade deal that would further expand the organization’s purview over the global economy. A century’s worth of social and economic reforms were at risk as well as our hopes for a more humane and environmentally sustainable global economy in the future. The WTO had already made a world of enemies. That is why old growth forest defenders and laid-off steelworkers, small farmers and anti-sweatshop campaigners, Teamsters and environmentalists in turtle suits were all in the streets together.

It was an all hands-on deck moment. With no one in charge listening, throwing our bodies against the gears of the machine to make it stop seemed like the only hope. And then to our astonishment, it worked. Long before November 30, 1999, movements in the Global South had been fighting capitalist globalization (previously known as colonialism) for decades if not centuries, often at a great cost. Nonetheless, with journalists from around the world already on hand for the WTO conference, the spectacle of tens of thousands of citizens of the richest, most powerful country in the world confronting their own government in the streets riveted a global audience and galvanized opposition to an economic model that had

seemed unassailable since the end of the Cold War a decade earlier.

“There are now two visions of globalization on offer,” *Newsweek* observed afterwards. “One led by commerce, one by social activism.”

A wave of global justice protests surged around the world over the next couple of years targeting not only the WTO but other global and regional financial institutions including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the G8 and the Organization of American States among others. Wherever they met, global elites had to hide behind walls of police protection. The gulf between the 1 Percent and the 99 could not have been clearer.

Seattle also inspired the formation of Indymedia, a decentralized global network of radical reporters’ collectives that invented online crowd-sourced journalism. At its peak, the Indymedia network had chapters in 200 cities around the world, including New York. This newspaper started as an Indymedia project nine months after Seattle and drew its early inspiration from the energy that the WTO protests unleashed. We’re often asked where the “y” in *The Indypendent* comes from. That’s where, Seattle.

At the end of September, 2001, as many as 100,000 people were expected to descend upon Washington, D.C. for protests against the IMF and the World Bank when the September 11 attacks occurred. The government and the media depicted protest and terrorism as two sides of the same coin. The unions and the large NGOs that had been important allies at Seattle and other subsequent protests got cold feet and bailed. A vibrant movement virtually disappeared from public view overnight. Smaller radical groups tried to keep the flame alive but were no match for increasingly militarized police forces they faced off with when they tried to carry out another Seattle-style shutdown. Relying on a single tactic was not a strategy.

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THE BATTLE OF SEATTLE helped throw the WTO into disarray for many years. But of course capital found myriad other ways to expand its power and reach. In the mid-2000’s, the left’s attention turned toward ending the war in Iraq. Eight years of a Bush presidency yielded to Obama’s cautious reformism. The only protests of note against trillions of dollars in Wall Street bank bailouts came from the Tea Party. As the years passed, the Battle of Seattle felt more like an exhilarating, one-off moment than an event of any lasting historical consequence.

Then, just when it seemed like protest was dead in this country, the Occupy movement took root in hundreds of parks and plazas across the country. Its 24/7 protest and militant tactics dominated the news cycle for two months, while its framing of the 99 Percent vs the 1 Percent permanently entered mainstream discourse and brought class politics back to life in the United States for the first time in decades. In style and substance and in its direct-action orientation, Occupy was Seattlesque in many ways, but led by a younger generation that grew up on the internet and social media and intuitively knew how to wield those tools.

In 2016, Bernie Sanders translated Occupy’s primal scream into a political platform that drew the support of millions. These days socialists and other left insurgent candidates — many of whom are women and people of color — are running and winning grassroots campaigns for elected offices high and low across the country, an achievement that was inconceivable 20 years ago. With the wind at its sails, the U.S. left finds itself in a moment that is both more promising and more dangerous than at any point in recent memory.

So did the Battle of Seattle change the world? No one protest can do that. But by spotlighting a rigged political and economic system and demanding radical changes, we were the proverbial canaries in the coal mine, signaling the devastating consequences of unfettered global capitalism and the future movements that would someday rise to challenge it. And if Trump and the Republicans try to steal the election next year, the kind of edgy but disciplined mass civil disobedience we saw in Seattle may take on a new relevance as well.





# ARTS & ORGANIZING

## HOW WE CREATED A FESTIVAL OF RESISTANCE

By DAVID SOLNIT

### SETTING OUR WORLD ON FIRE

I'm writing these notes in early November as fires rage across California. I've just returned from supporting family of mine living north of San Francisco. They lost power when 60-mile-an-hour winds crashed a giant tree onto Pacific Gas & Electric power lines and were evacuated to avoid the threat of wildfire. The cause? Climate chaos and an unregulated for-profit corporate utility — in both cases corporate capitalism's grab for wealth and power that has wrecked our planet, setting our world ablaze in California, Central Africa, the Amazon and elsewhere.

This is the nightmare of rampant corporate capitalism we warned of and pushed back against 20 years ago this month in Seattle. We confronted the World Trade Organization and its attempt to further write the rules of the global economy and concentrate power and wealth in the hands of the few while neutralizing people's resistance movements. WTO used euphemisms like "economic globalization" and "free trade" but those words disguised the poverty, misery and ecological destruction of the capitalist system.

We are surrounded by current examples of people power winning change — from the teachers' strikes to the climate strikes, from Ecuador last month to Puerto Rico last summer. Now seems like an important time to reflect on the struggles — 20 years ago and today — that show that when we organize, have some strategy and rebel, we can build power and win change.

### PUBLIC UPRISING AGAINST THE WTO

In the days after the mass direct action at the WTO summit, I wrote this description:

*On November 30, 1999 a public uprising shut down the World Trade Organization and took over downtown Seattle, transforming it into a festival of resistance. Tens of thousands of people joined the nonviolent direct action blockade which encircled the WTO conference site, keeping the most powerful institution on earth shut down from dawn till dusk, despite an army of federal, state and local police shooting tear gas, pepper spray, rubber, plastic and wooden bullets, concussion grenades and armored vehicles. The Washington National Guard's 81st Infantry Brigade, 1-303 Armor Battalion, and the 898th Combat Engineer Battalion [were] deployed.*

*People continued to resist throughout the week despite a clampdown that included nearly 600 arrests and [a] declaration of a "state of emergency" and [the] suspension of basic civil liberties in downtown Seattle. Longshore workers shut down every West Coast port from Alaska to Los Angeles. Large numbers of Seattle taxi drivers went on strike. All week the firefighters union refused authorities requests to turn their fire hoses on people. Tens of thousands of working people and students skipped or walked out of work or school. Solidarity action took place on every continent across the world.*

The city's police chief, Norm Stamper, told the *Seattle Times*: "There were those who were saying they would shut down the city of Seattle, and they managed to do that today."

The next day thousands of us defied their martial law and took to the streets and hundreds were arrested and attacked. People stayed in the streets — and remained in jail by the hundreds — all week until Dec. 3, when the WTO talks collapsed as representatives from poor countries, bolstered by public rebellion and pressure from movements in their home countries, refused to buckle under. The 1 Percent's plan to rule the world's economy through the WTO was scuttled, as we in the United States joined the global rebellion against neoliberal, corporate capitalism.

People across the world stood with us in solidarity, coordinated through People's Global Action, a network initiated by the Zapatistas, the indigenous rebel group in Chiapas, Mexico whose 1994 uprising targeted the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which they called a "death sentence" for their communities. While we marched in Seattle, thousands of farmers from Karnataka, India marched to Bangalore, and over a thousand villagers in the country's

Narmada Valley held a procession. Thousands took to the streets in the Philippines, Portugal, Pakistan, Turkey, South Korea and across Europe and North America.

### FESTIVAL OF RESISTANCE: CENTERING ARTS

There's much to be learned from the successes and mistakes of the Direct Action Network, the group that organized the mass nonviolent civil disobedience that filled the streets of downtown Seattle.

One thing we did well was centering the arts in our education, organizing and protests — and scaling it up to fill the streets with art, song and theater, as the authorities filled the streets with riot cops, teargas, and National Guardsmen.

The spread of arts organizing is one legacy of the Direct Action Network's effort to create new forms of resistance. Today we see mass art builds to prepare for teachers union strikes and the widespread use of arts organizing in the climate justice movements.

Our commitment to fusing art and organizing followed years of experimenting. In 1999 a network of art and revolution street theater collectives formed the Direct Action Network. We put everything we had learned at the center of our education, organizing and direct actions.

We toured up and down the West Coast with our Art and Revolution Street Theater troupe, joined by former Saipan sweatshop worker and organizer Chie Abad and David Reid, a locked-out Kaiser Aluminum worker. We used song, dance, puppetry and theater to convey the real-life stories of David and Chi, explaining why we needed to protect our communities from the WTO. We would follow these performances with art-making and nonviolent direct action trainings for people who would later join in the Seattle shutdown.

In the weeks before the WTO protests, we set up a mass "convergence" art-making space in a warehouse — also used for training, meetings, food and medical support — that involved hundreds, and supported groups making the art they needed for the streets.

As we wrote in our 1999 call to shut down the WTO:

*Tens of thousands of people will converge on Seattle and transform it into a festival of resistance [and] mass nonviolent direct action... [R]eclaim the streets with giant street theater, puppets, celebration, music, street parties and pleasure; vibrant sounds of community, creativity and resistance and glimpses of life as it could be in the face of hundreds of deadening businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians. Street theater used as a tool for making social change can break into people's consciousness, communicate powerfully and capture the imagination of participants and observers.*

*There is an incredible opportunity to use street theater — art, dance, music, giant puppets, graffiti art and theater — and nonviolent direct action to simplify and dramatize the issues of corporate globalization and to develop and spread new and creative forms of resistance. This will help catalyze desperately needed mass movements in the U.S. and Canada capable of challenging global capital and making radical change and social revolution.*

There is still an incredible opportunity — and an urgent need.

*David Solnit, is an arts organizer and editor of Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World and The Battle of the Story of the Battle of Seattle. He and a few other Direct Action Network founders and organizers are sharing reflections and stories of the Seattle WTO shutdown launching in mid-November at [ShutdownWTO20.org](http://ShutdownWTO20.org).*



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PASCAL J LÉ SEGRETAIN



RENÉE FELTZ

**HEAVY HANDED:** *Seattle police move to regain control of the streets after protesters shut down a World Trade Organization meeting on Nov. 30, 1999.*

**DOWN BUT NOT OUT:** *More than 500 people were arrested during the Seattle WTO protests. By week's end, corporate-backed negotiations on a new global trade deal had collapsed.*

**BEFORE SMARTPHONES:** *Citizen journalists used hand-held cameras like this to capture footage of the Seattle WTO protests and share it on indymedia.org.*





JACLYNN ASHLY

# NOT TO BE WASHED AWAY

## BELIEVERS IN THIS ANCIENT RELIGION FROM IRAQ HOLD WATER SACRED. THEY'RE NOW IN EXILE IN JORDAN WHERE AUTHORITIES WON'T LET THEM WORSHIP.

BY JACLYNN ASHLY & HISHAM AL-LAHAM

AMMAN, JORDAN — Abed al-Hasan's eyes fill with tears as he reminisces about his life before the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the majority of the Sabeen-Mandaeen — an ethno-religious minority in Iraq who practice Mandaism, an ancient Gnostic religion — were forced into exile.

"It's not easy to leave your homeland," the 49-year-old told *The Independent* at his home in Jordan's capital, Amman. "I felt defeated. I wish I could close my eyes and be back in Iraq before all of the chaos."

Prior to the U.S. invasion, nearly all of the world's some 70,000 Mandaeans lived along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, along with tributaries flowing into the Shatt al-Arab, or "River of the Arabs," in southern Iraq. The largest population of Mandaeans was concentrated in Baghdad.

"Before America came here, we were living in peace," Hasan, a father of five small children, said. After 2003, however, their lives unraveled. Today, less than 5,000 Mandaeans remain in Iraq, according to the Minority Rights Group.

### EASY TARGETS

Mandaeans trace their ancestry back to the rivers of ancient Mesopotamia and revere John the Baptist as their greatest prophet. Their belief system focuses on flowing water, which they believe represents the most basic component of life.

"Wherever there were rivers in Iraq, you would find Mandaeans there," Hasan said. "Anything we do for God, we must do it beside the rivers."

Hasan's current reality as an asylum seeker in Jordan contrasts sharply with how he described his life in Iraq. Today Hasan performs his prayers by stooping down next to an outdoor faucet at his house in Amman, reciting sacred texts in Aramaic and splashing tap water on his face and body.

While some rights groups have reported that the Mandaeans suffered forcible displacement under Saddam Hussein's rule, the Mandaean asylum seekers in Jordan tell *The Indy* that under the autocrat the community felt safe.

"Of course, we have always faced persecution," Hasan explained. "But it was mostly from individuals. We had laws and a strong secular legal system that protected us."

Qassem al-Madi, another Sabeen-Mandaeen who brought his family to Amman in 2017 to seek refuge, tells *The Indy* that the group began noticing more extremist ideologies spreading throughout Iraq following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in neighboring Iran. But the legal system was strong enough to contain it, he said.

Prior to the 2003 U.S. toppling of Saddam, Iraq was a police state, which meant that virtually all complaints filed with the Iraqi authorities would be followed up. "Any criminal activity, even petty theft, was seen as a threat to the security of the state," notes Ibrahim al-Marashi, associate professor of history at California State University San Marcos.

After 2003, however, Iraq's security infrastructure was dismantled and, according to Marashi, being a police officer was "basically a death sentence," as the police were often targeted by armed militias. This, coupled with a lack of resources, caused the policing system in Iraq to collapse.

Armed militias formed to protect communities in the security vacuum that followed Saddam's ouster. The Mandaeans quickly became targets of militias owing to their perceived wealth as skilled goldsmiths and their strict pacifist religious principles that do not permit violence or the ownership of weapons — even in the case of self-defense.

According to the Mandaean Associations Union (MAU), more than 200 Mandaeans are among the hundreds of thousands of civilians who have been killed in Iraq since 2003, while hundreds of members of the Gnostic sect have also been kidnapped for ransom.

"America said it would create freedom in Iraq, but it did the opposite," Hasan told *The Indy*. "America stole our freedoms away from us and created chaos. America destroyed Iraq and destroyed our culture and our lives."

### FORCED INTO EXILE

While most Mandaeans fled Iraq soon after the U.S. invasion, Madi, a father of eight, stayed in Baghdad despite the societal collapse around him.

Neighbors he had lived beside for years in Baghdad's Sadr City began turning on him. In the overwhelmingly Muslim country, they began avoiding his jewelry shop and greeting him with "Marhaba," Arabic for "Hi," refusing to use the traditional Islamic greeting of "Assalam Alaykum" they had previously exchanged.

Discrimination against the Mandaeans became so severe that no one would touch an object after a Mandaean had touched it.

"When we went to a fruit or vegetable market," Madi said, "the vendor would not even allow us to pick up the fruit ourselves because people would avoid his shop if they knew a Mandaean had touched the food."

Though some mixed communities continued to co-exist despite the ethno-sectarian tensions, the experience of Mandaeans in Baghdad is a microcosm of what frequently happened throughout Iraq: neighbors who had co-existed together for decades turned against one another.

Hasan also owned a jewelry shop like most Mandaeans in Baghdad. When he left his shop in the evening he would change his route home each night in case someone was following him.

"I started to not be able to tell people that I am Mandaean," he said. "People looked at us like we were subhuman. We felt constantly in danger."

Hasan was forced to pull his son out of school in third grade, fearing he would be the target of a kidnapping. "If my son drank from a water bottle, no one would drink after him," he said. "The other students would not even sit next to him because he is Mandaean."

In 2016, his jewelry shop was robbed. According to Hasan, when he went to the police to report the incident, the family of the culprit took up arms and shot up his home. "The police didn't take the incident seriously."

He and his family were forced to flee the country. Thaeer Issa lived on Falastin [Palestine] Street in Baghdad, a commercial area considered relatively



JACLYNN ASHLY



safe where many government ministries are located. One day, Issa's son, then 15, was on his way home from school with two friends, one of whom was Mandaean and the other was Muslim. A group of men stopped the teens and asked them to identify the Muslims and non-Muslims.

His son's Mandaean friend, scared and shaken, admitted he was not Muslim. He was kidnapped by the group, which demanded a ransom of \$50,000 from his family to release him.

Meanwhile, Issa's neighbor, whom he says before 2003 was a good friend of his, began developing extremist beliefs and reported Issa to Iraqi authorities for engaging in "terrorism," prompting Iraqi security officials to detain and interrogate him for a week.

Nevertheless, Issa and his family were determined to stay in Iraq. But one day in 2016, Issa came home from work and found an envelope posted on his door. Inside were a bullet and a note warning that if he and his family did not convert to Islam within seven days, they would all be killed.

Issa went to the police to report it and ask for protection. But, according to Issa, the police did nothing except advise him that it was in his best interest to pack up his things and get out of Iraq.

"There's no law in Iraq and no one can protect you," he told *The Indy* from Amman, where he currently resides. "We had no choice but to leave."

Some 5,000 Madaeans still in Iraq are "facing more or less the same situation," Marashi says.

#### WATER FOR WORSHIP

In Jordan, which hosts more than 1.3 million asylum seekers and refugees registered with the UN Refugee Agency, the Madaeans are safe from the extreme persecution they faced back in Iraq, but their lives are far from normal.

Many among the Jordanian population are prejudiced against them because of their religion.

The country also only has one major river: the Jordan River. But the Madaeans have been barred by the Jordanian government from using it for their religious practices because it is a tourist attraction, according to the group.

In response, the Madaeans began using water from Wadi Shuaib, a spring. "It's not a river, but we went there because we had no other choice," Issa said.

In 2016, however, the Jordanian government also prohibited them from accessing the spring, allegedly for their own protection, as they could be targeted by strict Salafi Muslims residing near the area.

But Issa tells *The Indy* he believes they are being restricted for the simple fact that they are Madaeans.

The group now must access water on private lands at the al-Bahath springs in Amman. They pay about \$4 each to ac-

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**FAR FROM HOME:** *Abed al-Hasan is forced to worship at this faucet rather than at a river as his Gnostic tradition dictates.*

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**A MOMENT OF PEACE:** *A Mandaean women recites ancient prayers.*

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cess the water for special religious occasions like marriages and baptisms.

According to the MAU, Madaeans are now scattered throughout the Middle East, Asia and Europe, with at least 1,400 Madaeans seeking asylum in Jordan.

Rights groups have warned that the Madaeans' ancient language, culture and religion are facing extinction due to their displacement around the world.

"If we were animals being decimated like this and nearing extinction, there would be NGOs formed around protecting us," Hasan said. "But the world has ignored us. No one is trying to protect us."

Hasan tells *The Indy* that Mandaean asylum seekers and refugees have lost hope for the survival of their religious practices. "We are only looking for safety and a future for our children," he says. "We don't have the energy to think about the survival of our culture."

Asylum seekers are not permitted to work in Jordan and MAU says the Madaeans are not receiving assistance from the United Nations Refugee Agency in Amman. Many are living off their dwindling savings from Iraq. Assuming an unexpected emergency doesn't eat up all of the funds, Hasan estimates his current savings won't last him more than another year.

His only chance at a normal life for himself and his family is if they are resettled, but all of their applications have so far been rejected.

"I don't care what country I go to," Hasan said. "I just want to go to any country where my family and I can be safe; whether that's France or Somalia, I don't care. Our lives are so hard and precarious here in Jordan. When our money finishes, we will have no choice but to return to Iraq to die."



JORGESILVA

## GLOBAL BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

### CHILEANS ROCK GOVERNMENT

It started with high school students in Santiago, Chile turnstile-hopping en masse to protest a subway fare hike and quickly morphed into a nationwide revolt, consisting of the largest demonstrations since the end of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet 30 years ago. As night fell on the initial Oct. 18 protest, violent confrontations erupted between riot police and protesters. Subway stations, along with the headquarters of Italian-owned multinational energy giant ENEL, were firebombed. President Sebastián Piñera declared a state of emergency, but that wasn't enough to quell the unrest, which has since spread nationally. The outrage on the streets of Chile goes far beyond the minimal fare hike and has more to do with the neoliberal order that continued long after the military dictatorship ended. "It's not about the 30 pesos. It's about 30 years," said popular singer Ana Tijoux, who was born of Chilean exiles living in France when Pinochet was in power. Piñera has pursued a two-pronged approach to bringing about peace and quiet. He's sacked his cabinet and made vague promises of reform, all while embarking on a brutal suppression campaign that has so far left at least 20 people dead. The demonstrators want to rewrite the constitution, which was written by the Pinochet regime and, among other dubious provisions, grants former participants in the dictatorship senate seats for life.

### HAITI AT A BOILING POINT

Corruption and poverty have run rampant in Haiti for decades and now they are pushing the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere to the brink. Schools have been closed since September. Food, fuel and medical supplies are running thin. And nearly 40 people have been killed in demonstrations calling for the ouster of President Jovenel Moïse, who came to power in 2017 amid allegations of fraud and graft. Mums been the word from the Trump Administration on the current crisis, though Moïse has sought to curry favor by distancing the

### DETERMINED:

*Chilean protesters return to the streets to demand the resignation of billionaire President Sebastian Pinera.*

island nation from one-time benefactor, Venezuela. Meanwhile Trump wants to lift the temporary protective status granted by the Obama Administration to 400,000 citizens of Haiti, as well as El Salvador and Honduras, living in the states.

### MASS PROTESTS IN IRAQ TARGET OIL & CORRUPT ELITES

More than 260 Iraqis protesting corruption and a lack of jobs and services have been killed by security forces since early October. The demonstrations, the largest since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, are centered in Baghdad but have spread nationwide to include blockades of oil refineries in the country's south. Protesters want to overhaul Iraq's political system, which they say favors wealthy elites. Much of the country's basic infrastructure remains in disrepair following the U.S. invasion 16 years ago and subsequent sectarian warfare.

### THE PLANET IS ON FIRE

Eleven thousand scientists from 153 countries issued a paper on Nov. 5 declaring a global climate emergency. It warns of "untold human suffering" unless steps are taken to move off of fossil fuels, restore ecosystems, consume less animal meat and, through economic and social justice measures, stabilize Earth's population. The declaration comes ahead of December's United Nations COP 25 climate talks, originally scheduled to take place in Santiago, Chile but moved to Madrid amid unrest. "Despite 40 years of major global negotiations, we have continued to conduct business as usual and have failed to address this crisis," William Ripple, a distinguished professor of ecology at the University of Oregon and one of the paper's lead authors, said in a statement. "Climate change has arrived and is accelerating faster than many scientists expected." Youth-led global climate strikes are scheduled for Friday, Dec. 6 during the climate talks. In NYC, students will gather outside of the U.N.





SOPHIE NEIMAN

# WHERE BEING GAY CAN BE DEADLY

## HOMOPHOBIA STOKED BY U.S. EVANGELICALS ONCE AGAIN HAS UGANDA'S LGBTQ COMMUNITY ON EDGE

BY SOPHIE NEIMAN

KAMPALA, UGANDA — A young gay activist named Brian Wasswa was discovered lying in a pool of blood in his home in the eastern city of Jinja on Oct. 4, after apparently having been struck multiple times over the head by an unknown assailant. He was rushed to the hospital but soon died.

In Uganda, where the legacy of British imperial rule and American evangelizing have combined to create a climate of rampant homophobia, such attacks are not uncommon.

Days after Wasswa's death, Uganda's Minister of Ethics and Integrity, Simon Lokodo, threatened to resurrect a 2014 act making homosexuality punishable by death. The bill would be brought to parliament in the coming weeks, he said. Multiple government representatives denied these claims, but the damage was done. Lokodo's incendiary comments began a media firestorm and sowed fresh seeds of anxiety in an already marginalized community.

"If [the anti-gay bill] comes back in its original form, then even me being who I am is a crime," said Kasha Nabagesera, a prominent LGBTQ rights leader. "I can't just say I am Kasha and this is who I am."

### A HATEFUL HISTORY

The Anti-Homosexuality Act, colloquially known as the 'Kill the Gays Bill,' first surfaced in 2009, shortly after a visit to Uganda by American evangelical pastor Scott Lively. His Abiding Truth Ministries is listed as an anti-gay hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, but traveling to Uganda, Lively he presented himself as an expert on homosexuality and gave a series of long talks at churches and to members of Parliament.

Activists see the original anti-gay legislation as partly the result of Lively's and other Americans' hate-mongering. "[American Evangelicals] introduced hostility," said Frank Mugisha, the executive director of Sexual Minorities Uganda, the country's leading LGBTQ advocacy organization. "They told Ugandans, 'You have to be aggressive, you have to act now.' They made [homosexuality] like a disease."

Despite being widely condemned by international leaders, including then-President Barack Obama, the Anti-Homosexuality Act passed in 2014 — only slightly amended so that homosexuality carried a sentence of life in prison rather than death.

The legislation was ultimately overturned on a technicality in Uganda's Constitutional Court, but deep animosity toward Uganda's LGBTQ community remains.

"You can't go to the grocery store next to your house, you can't get a motorcycle in the boda boda [taxi] line," said Nicholas Opiyo, a human rights lawyer who was instrumental in fighting the 2014 legislation.

Asked if LGBTQ individuals in Uganda fear being killed, Mugisha answered without hesitation. "Every

day," he said. "Every day."

In August, a lesbian woman seeking eyeglasses was so savagely beaten by her doctor that her skull cracked and her arm was dislocated.

"It is very difficult, if not impossible, to make a causal link between political anti-LGBT discourse and any particular case of violence," said Neela Ghoshal, a researcher for Human Rights Watch. "What's clear is that it does send a message to the population that they can get away with anti-LGBT violence because they are essentially furthering the aims of the state."

Uganda's Minister of Health Jane Ruth Aceng has met with LGBTQ activists, assuring them that she opposes discriminatory health care practices.

"We in the health sector do not discriminate against anyone," Minister Aceng told *The Independent*. "Not by religion, not by gender, not by sex. Everybody is entitled to health care. That is very clear in the constitution."

## 'I CAN'T KEEP LOSING PEOPLE. I CAN'T.'

### ARRESTED FOR BEING GAY

While the constitution offers a semblance of protection to Uganda's LGBTQ community, the country's colonial-era penal code punishes acts such as sodomy with seven years to life in prison.

When an LGBTQ shelter and nonprofit on the outskirts of Uganda's capital Kampala was attacked by a homophobic mob on Oct. 23, frightened men inside called the police for help. Sixteen of them were taken into protective police custody, only to be arrested themselves, subjected to anal examinations and charged with acts "against the order of nature."

"This is the worst thing that could have happened to anyone," said one of the arrested men, concerned for his safety and speaking on the condition of anonymity. "It is demeaning. It is inhumane." He added that he and his compatriots were "beaten and slapped" when they hesi-

tated to comply with officers' orders.

The United Nations Committee Against Torture has condemned the practice of forced anal exams, but Ugandan police claim they are a necessary part of evidence gathering. "It is of course a procedure in investigations," Fred Enanga, a spokesperson for the Kampala police, told *The Indy*. "These are probably cases that require all evidence that is on a person's body."

"You want to commit suicide," said the arrested man. "We don't have any hope."

In this volatile environment, observers worry that the Anti-Homosexuality Act could be introduced by an individual member of Parliament, even though the ruling National Resistance Movement party officially denies that it plans to propose the controversial legislation once more.

At the very least, the anti-gay sentiment caused by Lokodo's remarks could be used to divert attention from problems facing the government, including a growing "People Power" movement led by popular singer Bobi Wine. Wine, who has previously made homophobic comments in his songs, has vowed to end President Yoweri Museveni's decades-long rule and the government is actively seeking to suppress his activism.

"Often when the state is facing criticism they seek distraction, so they pull out the LGBT boogeyman to get people to stop thinking about the other human rights violations that are taking place in Uganda," said Ghoshal of Human Rights Watch.

"We've seen this in a lot of countries," added Adam Shapiro of Front Line Defenders, an organization dedicated to protecting the lives of activists abroad. "Riling up people against the threat that the LGBT community allegedly poses becomes a way to mobilize voters."

Uganda is only 18 months away from what will surely be a contentious national election in which Wine plans to run for president.

Meanwhile, police in Jinja tell *The Indy* they are continuing to investigate Brian Wasswa's death. He is the fourth LGBTQ Ugandan to be killed in a span of just three months.

In the midst of threats, deaths and beatings, a deep sense of fear and sorrow seem all that is certain for Uganda's LGBTQ community.

For activist Kasha Nabagesera, Wasswa's death is a reminder of David Kato, a gay man who was beaten to death with a hammer outside of his Kampala home in 2011.

"[Wasswa] died the same way David died. Can you imagine? He was killed the same way David was killed," she said. "I can't keep losing people. I can't. I can't. I can't."

Speaking with *The Indy* as early morning sunshine poured into his Kampala office, Opiyo, the lawyer, evoked Martin Niemöller's famous Holocaust remembrance poem: "First they came for the Communists/ And I did not speak out/ Because I was not a Communist..."

"This isn't about a small community," he said. "This is a human rights violation. If we allow the government and society to violate the rights of LGBT individuals, they can go on and get the next people, the next minority."





JACOB SPETZLER

# YOU CAN JAIL THE ARTIST, BUT YOU CAN'T...

## MEET THE MUSICIANS FIGHTING MASS INCARCERATION FROM BEHIND PRISON WALLS

BY OLIVIA RIGGIO

Philadelphia native B.L. Shirelle began rapping at the age of 7. When she was 8, she won third place in a poetry competition her teacher entered her into.

But while she excelled in school, life was different at home. Her mother was a drug addict. Shirelle began selling drugs with her around age 12.

“By the time I was 18, I was in prison serving a 12-year sentence for aggravated assault,” she says. “I got out when I was around 24. Lack of resources, things like that, lack of patience, lack of self-esteem led me to selling drugs again. I wasn’t really patient enough with myself and at that time, there weren’t a lot of resources for violent offenders to get good jobs.”

While serving her second sentence in Pennsylvania’s Muncy state prison in 2014, Shirelle performed hip-hop songs she’d written with three other inmates as part of a TEDx talk.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn-based artist and activist Fury Young had an idea to launch a concept album called *Die Jim Crow* that would incorporate the music of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. He’d been reading Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and was listening to concept albums by artists like Pink Floyd.

Young said the issue resonated with him because he has friends who had been incarcerated. But he was reluctant to do the album at first, because, “I’m white, I’m Jewish, I’ve never been to prison.” Prisoners and others talked him into it, so he teamed up with Brooklyn-based artist and producer Dr. Israel.

He asked Shirelle if she wanted to take part after seeing her TEDx video. She wrote a few songs and sent them back to him.

Shirelle had also read *The New Jim Crow* and said she was not surprised by Alexander’s comparisons of the prison-industrial complex to slavery and Jim Crow laws.

During her first prison sentence, Shirelle filled notebooks with her poetry, but when Young contacted her, she was in a poor mental state and was not writing. There were no real opportunities to perform in prison either.

“It was kind of something that if we got in the yard and people were rapping, I would kind of come out, but

I didn’t come out for everybody,” she says.

Her correspondence with Young inspired her, and her music was featured on the original 2016 *Die Jim Crow* EP.

After recording other incarcerated and formerly incarcerated artists, Young decided that *Die Jim Crow* could not just be captured on one record, so he formed a *Die Jim Crow* nonprofit with plans to release more records featuring them. Shirelle, now out of prison, is its deputy director. The group plans to make *Die Jim Crow* a full-fledged record label.

“They’re learning a ton,” Young says. “I mean, we’re all learning a ton. But, they’re learning a lot of different skills and how to be in a professional setting and work in a nonprofit. And again, so am I. But for someone who grew up selling drugs since they were 12 years old, I think that’s fucking amazing.”

Another musician and lyricist involved in the project goes by the name of Ach. He is part of a group called the Masses, and is serving a 22-year sentence in South Carolina.

“Just knowing that I could not only have my voice heard for something that I’ve been chasing my whole life, but also to be doing something that is a voice for social change for the condition that I’m in right now, it was a no-brainer for me,” Ach said. “We have a whole plethora of styles and angles, but overall our message is, don’t do anything that will put you in this situation or that will destroy your community or your families.”

For Shirelle, music is deeply personal and therapeutic. She wrote the lyrics for the fiery 2018 *Die Jim Crow* single, “Headed to the Streets.”

“I’m haunted by the penitentiary screams,” she raps, her voice urgent and resonant:

*Victimized  
Shiesty bitch with schemes  
Institutionalized  
I carry razors in the slits of my jeans  
Hidden in seams  
Tell me what this liberty means  
Now that I’m out can I live and be free?*

The song, like all *Die Jim Crow*’s projects, was a collaborative, patchwork effort involving musicians from various prisons and on the outside. The music was composed by Anthony McKinney and Mark B. Springer, who are both serving life sentences at Warren Correctional Institution in Ohio, after Young brought Shirelle’s lyrics to them. Most of the musicians on the track were inmates at the same prison, and McKinney also sang on it. Lead guitarist gHSTS & gUITARS spent his youth in the juvenile justice system. Ezette Edouard and Dexter Nurse, who were both incarcerated in the New York prison system, provided the background lyrics.

Young usually finds incarcerated musicians and singers by asking volunteers or employees at various prisons to put him in touch with people who may be interested. There are often problems.

“You just don’t know when people are going to get transferred,” he says. “You don’t know when someone’s going to be in lockup, like, in solitary, or just locked in their cell.”

Young says he rarely knows what crimes inmates are serving time for. He focuses on working with them as artists. “When you are around people, people are people,” he says. “If you’re vibing with someone and you pick up that they’re trying to give out good intentions and work hard and be musical and so forth, it’s going to work out.”

Although Young does not consider himself a prison abolitionist, he believes everyone deserves dignity and second chances.

“I think that the ‘worst of the worst,’ so to speak, still deserve another shot,” he said. “There’s a guy we work with named Michael Tennesen who did kill five people. And he’s one of the hearts of *Die Jim Crow*. This guy is one of the strongest white allies I’ve ever met. This guy has stuck his neck out for people who are black and queer.”

For Shirelle, *Die Jim Crow* is an opportunity to help incarcerated people feel like they can leave a legacy. The project can help them use their talents constructively when they re-enter society.

“The prison lifestyle is a dehumanizing lifestyle,” she said. “They try to make you feel like you’re not worthy of certain things. And it takes a really strong mind to not believe those things. So if we give a person something to do to be of value, if we actually give these people platforms where they can be heard and platforms where they can share their talent and hear people saying, ‘Yo, that’s awesome. Keep going. You’re super talented,’ it might give a lifer a reason to actually get up every day and live for the moment, or it may give a long-termer something to look forward to every day.”

For Ach, music is about redemption.

“It is possible for us to awaken,” Ach said. “It is possible for us to not only awaken but to awaken others and to reach out and to become something better, something different, something new.”

**OUR MAN ON THE OUTSIDE:** *Fury Young has used his record label to help dozens of incarcerated persons record their music from behind bars.*



# THE END OF CORPORATE MUSIC

*Silenced by Sound: The Music Meritocracy Myth*

BY IAN BRENNAN  
PM PRESS

By Steven Wishnia

Ian Brennan's *Silenced by Sound: The Music Meritocracy Myth* is a polemic against the domination of the world's ears by the American corporate-superstar empire, in favor of the unknown, the personal, the amateur; for impassioned music from the most extreme margins of the world — a colony of albinos in Tanzania, an Abatwa (Pygmy) woman in Rwanda singing "Why Did We Stop Growing Tall?" and a nicotine-marinated Serbian busker playing the gusle, a one-string bowed instrument.

These musicians, Brennan argues, deserve to be heard more than the overplayed superstars, because they're at least as talented and a lot more soulful, coming from a place where music is human instead of product. "We don't so much need plastic-surgery honed proxy Gods, or American witch doctor pharmaceutical giants," Brennan writes. "We require stronger depth of communication between individuals."

Written in vignettes — a mix of philosophizing, diatribes, memoirs, advice, and field-recording chronicles — *Silenced by Sound* is often dead-on. The flaw is that for a book so polemical, it's often wildly contradictory.

Brennan denounces the concept of "heroic authorship," contending that music should be produced anonymously, but in the next paragraph complains that music created by people outside the superstar culture gets credited to a faceless folk tradition instead of their own efforts. He lists Bruce Springsteen among rock artists who should have been paid to stop recording, saying that if his career had been terminated after his 1982 Nebraska album, the world would have been spared the "Rambo-rock caricature" of "Born in the U.S.A." But two pages later he notes that "Born in the U.S.A." in reality was a song about a disillusioned Vietnam War veteran, not a "patriotic jingle."

Brennan has earned the right to rant a bit. A specialist in field recordings who's also produced North African desert-rock band Tinariwen and Bob Dylan mentor Ramblin' Jack Elliott, he's put his body where his ears are, recording singers and musicians in the mountains of Somaliland and prison camps in Malawi.

Still, *Silenced by Sound* could have used a more rigorous editor, someone to challenge Brennan to think in more depth about the complications and implications of his ideas. He often seems to romanticize first-thought-best-thought amateurishness. For example, he was thrilled when his 19-month-old daughter improvised a four-note melody while strumming a guitar, saying it was better than any music he ever did.

I can understand this. When my son was 6, I did a free-jazz gig in a Lower East Side community garden. After soundcheck, he sat down at the drums and rather than bang randomly as young boys tend to do, he played waves of sound from the cymbals and snare, impressing our improv-veteran horn player.

On the other hand, he never replicated that. And if a kid still in diapers can play more inspiring music than someone experienced, what's the point of developing your craft?

Despite all these criticisms, I empathize with where Brennan is coming from. He despises a culture where a handful of rock guitar soloists are venerated as deities, while it's a safe bet that less than one American in 10,000 has ever heard of the Guinean guitarist Sekou Diabaté. (I hadn't, until last spring.) When I was in Ecuador some 30 years ago, a friend of my relatives there wanted to show off his record collection to the visiting North American rockero — discs by the kind of past-their-prime classic-rock artists Brennan says should have been paid to quit. But he played one album that really moved me: *Las Alturas de Macchu Picchu* by Los Jaivas, a Chilean band exiled after the 1973 military coup.

It wedded Andean mountain-breath flutes and Pablo Neruda's poetry to the Western European prog-rock style. It's an example of how, at least to my taste, some of the most exciting music in the world since the rise of electric instruments has come from musicians blending local and imported sounds — Fela Kuti and the Congolese bandleader Verckys reappropriating James Brown's American Africanisms, Moroccan street musicians adopting the American banjo to Maghrebi style, the electric-saz rock bands of Turkey.

While Brennan decries the soullessness of digital recording, however, the book doesn't discuss how technology is also supplanting musicianship in the non-Western world. Programming electronic music is easier and cheaper than buying instruments, schlepping gear, and dealing with the conflicts of tastes, skills, and personalities that come with trying to keep a live band together. With hip-hop the dominant music among black Americans, it and its electronic relatives are also the dominant sounds in the favelas of Brazil and the dance-halls of Jamaica.

Still, *Silenced by Sound: The Music Meritocracy Myth* is worth reading if you want your ears opened to music from places far outside the corporate empire, without the marketing cliché of "world music." If it vexes you to live in a world where Spotify-automated playlists of well-worn oldies and Auto-Tuned vocals over preprogrammed rhythm tracks have superseded live music, quiet, and individually chosen mix tapes, you'll find it nicely provocative.

Come prepared to be skeptical, however. Brennan himself titles his pages of advice "Tips to Be Taken With a Grain of Salt." There are reasons for artistic rules, but as George Orwell famously wrote in his guide to clear political writing, "Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous."

"Every page of *Silenced by Sound* is like listening to a fresh, bracing, previously unknown kind of music for the very first time."  
—David Harrington (Kronos Quartet)

## SILENCED BY SOUND

THE MUSIC MERITOCRACY MYTH



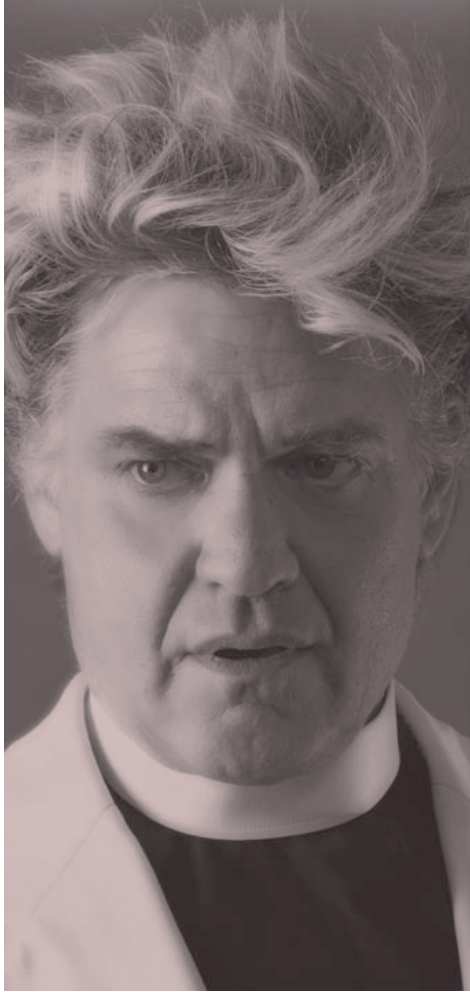
Ian Brennan

Foreword by  
Tunde Adebimpe (TV on the Radio)

The great myth about punk rock, the music that first inspired Brennan in a rootless Bay Area suburb, is that it was done by musicians who couldn't play their instruments. The ones who made an impact could play, at least within the limits of four-chord rock'n'roll. The point was not to glorify incompetence, but that intensity was more important than displays of technique. The art of rock'n'roll, after all, is about creating music that is unique and driving but can still be roughly approximated by a 14-year-old with their first guitar.



# TRUMP DEPRESSION HOTLINE



*in his red cap. I've tried keeping my trap shut. But we've had bad run-ins. We'll be on a family fishing retreat on Black Oak Lake in Vilas County, Wisconsin, so I can't avoid him this Thanksgiving. But, I love the schmuck. How am I supposed to cope!*

— LIONEL, Ditmas Park

Lionel,

Are you asking the pastor for a way to be comfortable? Asking to feel better while depicting this uncle of yours as a duped bumpkin, well, be careful. There's fascism lurking in a privileged person's comfort. Lionel, nothing's as clear as you make it. Things are turning inside out. They are using live ammunition. The streets of the cities of the world are screaming, the flood and fire is raging closer and closer. The American consumer's comfort-and-convenience is besieged like a sexual closet in a fishing shack in Wisconsin.

You've got to love the schmuck so much that he can't hate anymore. Do this by loving yourself enough to stop de-humanizing him. The Trump people got us dancing to their tune. Hate! Easy to use! Apply as directed! Actually, Lionel, the Trumpers aren't the real source of all this. The 1 Percent got the right and left moving like we're not on the same dance floor. But I believe that you and Uncle Sean can along.

Instead of fishing with him, drinking beer and farting on the lake with the loons, why don't you go hiking? Get out of the boat and find a path and walk a long ways, until you get lost and it's getting dark. Get lost in the wilderness. Get lost and get desperate for your friendship to work. Get lost and wonder if there are bears around here. Uncle Sean needs your knife and you need his rope and you got to save each other. Get lost and maybe you 'll lose your prejudices. You two need to start over.

*Hi Billy — Maybe I'll see you at Joe's Pub this year. One person I'm not looking forward to seeing this holiday season, however, is my Uncle Sean. Aside from his slovenly boozing, he's a MAGA fanatic who practically showers*

• • •

Dear Billy,

*I was debating the other night with a friend about freedom of speech and whether there should be limits on it given the way it's being wielded by the far right to divide and demonize people in really harmful ways. What do you think?*

— EVELYN, Harlem

Dear Evelyn,

The far right wants it the other way around. The right believes that limits should be placed on what the left says, because the right feels that we have divided and demonized people in really harmful ways.

Well, white liberals controlled the media, and education, and the arts. And then freedom of expression was, over the years, sold to the market. We let that happen. Long before Donald Trump there was Ivory Soap, 99 and 44/100% pure Ivory Soap. We pretended that the neo-liberal take-over was guaranteed by the Constitution; that corporations' should have the rights of personhood, and therefore freedom of expression for their marketing. We are swept up into these super-persons. We walk around with logos and ad ditties on our bodies.

The First Amendment will be protected when our opinions are delivered with the power of a gift economy. The planet crier is shouting in Times Square, and she is offering her news for free. She has a stronger voice than the 50-foot-high rubberized canvass celebrity who hangs over her from the side of a building. In the Church of Stop Shopping we believe that products are the Devil. Products' voices are weak and cold because people are instinctive ad-blockers. To have freedom of expression, you need to love.

LOVE-A-LUJAH!  
Reverend Billy

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